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Forms of the Sublime in Contemporary Anglo-American Novel and Cinema

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Zásady pro vypracování

Cílem diplomové práce je zmapovat různorodost pojetí estetické kategorie ”vznešena” (angl. Sublime) v nedávné angloamerické literární a filmové tvorbě. Metodologickou oporou pro výzkum jsou poznatky z oblasti estetiky (např. Burke, Doran, Brady, Shaw), mediálních studií (např. McLuhan) a Reader-Response Criticism (např. Davis a Womack). Hlavním cílem autora je sledovat vazbu mezi pojetím ”vznešena”, typem média a dobovou estetikou. Zjistí, jakým způsobem současná tvorba z tradičního chápání Vznešena, zejména z úvah z 18. století, čerpá či jakým způsobem tuto kategorii aktualizuje. Dále ověří, zda ve spojitosti s touto estetickou koncepcí platí McLuhanova slavná teze ”the medium is the message,” která zakládá vztah mezi typem média a obsahem sdělení. Své úvahy autor práce podpoří zevrubným rozborem vybrané skupiny psaného a vizuálního materiálu. Předmětem analýzy bude například postapokalyptický román *Cesta* od Cormaca McCarthyho, Gravity’s Rainbow Thomase Pynchona, Cronenbergova *Moucha* či snímky Davida Lynche. Autor bude také sledovat změny v povaze zdroje prožitku ”vznešena” ve smyslu odklonu od elitního diskursu intelektuálů v 18. století směrem k současné masové kultuře.

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Prohlašuji:

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V Pardubicích dne 31. března 2025

Jakub Fousek v. r.

To the memory of David Lynch

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ANNOTATION

This thesis examines the aesthetic category of the sublime and explores its various modern forms in contemporary Anglo-American fiction and cinema. The theoretical chapter delineates concepts of the sublime starting with traditional forms such as the rhetorical and natural sublime, observes the concept's relationship to different media, and then explores relevant modern forms, including the sublate and the digital or technological sublime. The first analytical section explores how modern forms of the sublime based on disgust function in McCarthy's *The Road* and Cronenberg's *The Fly*. The second analytical part then examines Brooker's *Black Mirror* and Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* in the context of the technological and digital sublime.

KEYWORDS

the sublime, aesthetics, disgust, media, technology

ANOTACE

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá estetickou kategorií vznešena a zkoumá její moderní pojetí v nedávné angloamerické filmové a literární tvorbě. Teoretická kapitola rozebírá tradiční koncepce vznešena jako např. řečnické či přírodní vznešeno, zkoumá vazbu mezi vznešenem a různými médii, a poté se zaměřuje na relevantní moderní formy, jako je vznešeno vycházející z pocitu znechucení, či digitální nebo technologické vznešeno. První analytická část práce se zabývá tím, jakými způsoby jsou moderní podoby vznešena pramenící z pocitu znechucení pojaty v McCarthyho románu *Cesta* či filmu *Moucha* od Davida Cronenberga. Druhá analytická část zkoumá seriál *Černé zrcadlo* od Charlieho Brookera a román *Duha gravitace* Thomase Pynchona v kontextu technologického a digitálního vznešena.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

vznešeno, estetika, znechucení, média, technologie

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INTRODUCTION

> "Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling."[1]
>
> — Edmund Burke (1757)

The sublime, as an aesthetic category, has a long and varied history, encompassing a wide range of concepts. What they all have in common, however, is that they all amount to an incomprehensible feeling that the aforementioned Edmund Burke and many other thinkers have described as the highest of the high; the strongest emotion that the human mind can feel. However, like the aesthetic category itself, the word "Sublime" has undergone a significant change. In today's world, objects, events, and even works of art that are described as sublime with a lowercase initial letter often refer to qualities similar to "beautiful," "wow," or "cool," yet they retain only a part of the traditional meaning that had to do with the appreciation of aesthetic qualities. Historically, the category of the sublime has not only consisted of positive values, but, as Burke shows above, has rather been based on terror and fear.

As many early eighteenth-century theorists observed on their journeys through the Alps, when the human mind encounters an extraordinary object whose immensity and power cannot be fully grasped, it resorts to a feeling of the sublime. As an aesthetic experience, the sublime consists of two integral parts. The first, somewhat preserved in the contemporary meaning of the word, refers to a certain "wow effect," the pleasure or wonder that arises from the powerful entity. Second, in the sublime, this pleasure is mixed with irresistible feelings of doom, fear, and one's own smallness and insignificance in relation to the immense object. As a result, Burke and others speak of negative pleasures that overwhelm the senses and appear on the borderline between the ambivalent emotions of terror and wonder.

As time passed and new technologies developed, the characteristics of the category of the sublime also changed. More recently, scholars have recognized its interdisciplinary value, ranging from literary theory to aesthetics. The experience of the sublime has come to be seen not only as a direct human aesthetic experience of nature, but also as extending to other disciplines and fields, such as literature, film, politics, and even advertising.[2] Moreover, with technological progress and the introduction of new media, critics are now also concerned with

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[1] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. Adam Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 36.

[2] Kenneth Holmqvist, and Jaroslaw Płuciennik, "A Short Guide to the Theory of the Sublime," *Style* 36, no. 4 (2002): 726, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/style.36.4.718.

how various media and modern objects of technology transform and operate with the concept.[3] Thus, the main goal of this thesis is to analyze products of contemporary culture, specifically the Anglo-American novel and cinema, and to delineate the diversity of the aesthetic category of the sublime.

In the context of technological and other advances, the sublime has become the subject of much academic debate. While the traditional concept was primarily concerned with the aesthetic experience of nature, some modern forms currently identify their sources in digital technology and man-made objects, as evidenced by recent discussions of the connection between the sublime and the genre of science fiction.[4] Currently, scholars identify the presence of the technological and digital sublime, where similar ambivalent emotions arise from modern objects of technology. Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to analyze modern cinematic and written material that deals with technological progress and to explore how the technological and digital sublime can be applied to such works.

Moreover, some critics who have focused on the sources of the sublime in contemporary culture have noted a shift from its foundation in fear to other intense aesthetic experiences such as disgust.[5] Therefore, this thesis seeks to draw a parallel between the emotion of disgust and the aesthetic experience of the sublime, and to explore how recent works of cinema and literature transmogrify the traditional concept.

As mentioned in connection with Burke, early eighteenth-century theorists and intellectuals first described the experience of the sublime on their journeys across the Alps, which is why the sublime can be seen as an elite discourse. Drawing on recent discussions of the experience of the sublime in modern film and literature, the thesis also aims to examine the shift from an elite discourse of eighteenth-century intellectuals to mass culture. Another aim of the thesis is to focus on the possible shift of the sources of the sublime from extraordinary objects and events to the mundane and everyday, and to observe whether the sublime is still based on objects outside of everyday life or rather arises from ordinary causes.

The methodological framework of the analyses is based on insights from aesthetics (e.g. Burke, Shaw, Brady, Doran), media and film studies (McLuhan, Mathias, Pence, Carroll) and reader-response theory (e.g. Davis, Womack, Tompkins, Rosenblatt). In relation to media

[3] See, for example, Gillian Borland Pierce, ed., *The Sublime Today: Contemporary Readings in the Aesthetic* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012).
[4] See, for example, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr, *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction* (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2011).
[5] See Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Savoring Disgust: The Foul and the Fair in Aesthetics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

studies, the thesis aims to explore how the experience of the sublime relates to the media of film and literature, and whether and how the aesthetic experience changes across media. In particular, it intends to examine the relationship between Marshall McLuhan's "the medium is the message" and this aesthetic category.

The first chapter of the thesis focuses on traditional and modern forms of the sublime and provides an essential methodological framework for the analyses. In addition to providing insight into the transformation from the rhetorical sublime, it also focuses on its relationship to reader-response theory, media studies, the category of the grotesque, and Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection. Finally, it introduces modern forms of the sublime that are relevant to the analysis.

The second chapter first explores how the elements of immersion and distance relate to the experience of the sublime. It then focuses on a close analysis of a written medium, namely Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006), and explores how some of the modern forms of the sublime based on disgust can be applicable to this novel. The chapter also analyzes selected scenes from Canadian filmmaker David Cronenberg's *The Fly* (1986) and observes how the aesthetic experience of disgust is realized in the cinematic medium.

The third chapter is concerned with modern forms of the sublime that emerge from objects of technology. The main part of the chapter analyzes in detail how this form of the sublime operates in cinematic material, specifically in the episode "Nosedive" (2016) of the British television series *Black Mirror*. It then focuses on the shift from elite discourse to mass culture. The last part of the chapter analyzes Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1986) and explores how the experience of the sublime is realized in the written medium as opposed to film.

A Note on the Text

As mentioned in the "Introduction", there are two spelling variants of the word "sublime", with either a capital or a lowercase initial letter. In the following text, the author uses the lowercase variant as the preferred option, following the convention in recent scholarly publications. In direct quotations, the author respects the original spelling. Occurrences of missing punctuation and other linguistic deviations in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* respect the original. Archaic language and capitalization in writings by Joseph Addison and John Dennis also respect the originals. The paper builds on the author's previous research outlined in his bachelor thesis *"The Sublime" in David Lynch's Work* (2023). In particular, some parts of Chapters 1 and 2 on traditional concepts and the cinematic sublime were drafted in Chapter 1 of the bachelor thesis, and some parts of Chapter 3 on Lynch were drafted in Chapters 2 and 3 of the bachelor thesis.

1. TRADITIONAL AND MODERN FORMS OF THE SUBLIME

First, this theoretical chapter aims to focus on reader-response theory and illustrate the relationship between the recipient and the aesthetic experience such as the sublime. The chapter then outlines the shift from the rhetorical sublime to the natural sublime, focusing on the change in the media used to convey the sublime and the objects associated with this aesthetic category. Furthermore, this part attempts to apply the perspective of media theorist Marshall McLuhan to the aesthetic category of the sublime. In relation to traditional concepts, the chapter discusses the works of thinkers such as Edmund Burke, John Dennis, or Joseph Addison, focusing on the sublime as intellectual discourse and how the conceptualization of the sublime differs in each view. Before turning to modern forms of the sublime, the chapter compares this aesthetic category to the grotesque and focuses on Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection, presenting the modern form of the sublime experience arising from disgust, followed by other modern forms such as the technological and digital sublime. The final part of the chapter discusses the cinematic sublime and the relationship between new media and the sublime, illustrating the ways in which the category is changing due to shifts in media and comparing them to McLuhan's account.

Before focusing on various forms of the sublime, it is essential to discuss its relationship with the subject (or, more precisely, with the reader or the audience, based on the type of media). Initially, it should be mentioned how and when the subject can experience the sublime. As Philip Shaw observes, "whenever experience slips out of conventional understanding, whenever the power of an object or event is such that words fail and points of comparison disappear, then we resort to the feeling of the sublime."[6] Thus, the sublime aesthetic experience is closely related to the subject's personal reception of the particular object or event. Moreover, it can be said that because of the absence of understanding, the experience is likely to transcend the boundaries of language and often even the capacities of rational human comprehension. This argument is directly linked to reader-response theory, which is grounded in the relationship between the subject and the work (although since it deals primarily with readers, its application to films is going to be explored in due course). As Jane P. Tompkins notes, the subject cannot understand a work of art in its entirety, but only its results. According to her, psychological and other effects are crucial factors in understanding the work, but the meaning exists exclusively in the mind of the subject.[7] In this sense, the subject plays a central role in the creation of

[6] Philip Shaw, *The Sublime* (Abington, Oxon: Routledge, 2007), 2.
[7] Jane P. Tompkins, ed., *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), ix.

meaning, while the work can be perceived as a mere medium. Tompkins also explains that meaning "is not something one extracts from a poem, like a nut from its shell, but an experience one has in the course of reading."[8] Therefore, meaning cannot simply be extracted. Rather, meaning is an experience that consists of a whole range of feelings, from the positive ones that are pleasurable to the disgusting or other ambivalent aesthetic experiences that this paper will focus on later. Some of these encounters may even be beyond human understanding and explanation, such as the experience of the sublime.

Another point to explore is how works of art can trigger aesthetic experience in the subject. First, it is crucial to note that reader-response theory works with two modes of reception between which the subject does not consciously choose, but which are rather based on the type or other characteristics of the text. As Todd F. Davis and Kenneth Womack explain, the first mode can be called "efferent" and means that the subject's interpretation is based solely on the information and data that remain after reading the text, whereas in the second "aesthetic" mode, the reception is based on what happens *during* the reading.[9] Moreover, Louise M. Rosenblatt notes that one feels a personal connection to the text when reading in the aesthetic mode, which draws the reader's attention to the emotional nuances of the language and motivates the reader to form an opinion.[10] Therefore, if the subject consumes a particular work with qualities that they can relate to or that allow them to become fully immersed in, the work may elicit aesthetic or other emotional responses that can be further analyzed. Moreover, as will be discussed in the second part of the paper, the element of immersion also contributes greatly to the emergence of aesthetic experiences.

It should also be noted that the subject generally desires to be somehow impacted by the work, often not realizing that the meaning is created in the mind, which often only adds to the aesthetic experience. Robert Scholes confirms this when he says that "[t]he spectator or reader of a narration assumes that he is in the grip of a process controlled outside himself, designed to do things to him which he will be powerless to resist, and that if he struggles will only enmesh him farther in the author's toils."[11] Therefore, while consuming the work, the recipients place their complete trust in the author to "enmesh them in his toils," which can make them feel almost like puppets in certain situations. Moreover, this desire to be influenced by some aspects

[8] Tompkins, *Reader-Response Criticism*, xvi.
[9] Todd F. Davis and Kenneth Womack, *Formalist Criticism and Reader-Response Theory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 54–55.
[10] Louise M. Rosenblatt, *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994), 27–28.
[11] Robert Scholes, "Narration and Narrativity in Film," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 1, no. 3 (August 1976): 289.

of the work also directly corresponds to Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection, which will be explored in more detail later in this chapter. As Sara Heinämaa observes, in certain scenarios, the recipients may feel a certain power of fascination that draws them close and attracts them to the abject, which is caused by an unknown "alluring" force.[12] Due to this, the recipient can feel completely astonished and overwhelmed by the various effects the work of art has on them, which in turn contributes to the feeling of the sublime or the intensity of the aesthetic experience. The source of such effects may not be found directly in the language used (or in the visual content of films), but rather in the recipient's overall emotional experience created while watching or reading the work. Both the awareness and the lack of awareness of the recipients that the meaning exists only in their own minds are of equal importance. In order to experience the sublime, one thinks of it as a force outside of oneself, but to describe and analyze it, the recipients should be aware that it is their own response. However, all of this will unfold in the second part of the paper, which will focus on analyzing different works of art and the way they impact their recipients, especially in terms of the experience of the sublime, which can be a very subjective matter, and where one experiences it, another may not. Taking all this into consideration, the sublime can be understood from here on as a way of impacting the recipient.

The category of the sublime encompasses a wide range of concepts, perhaps the most well-known of which is closely associated with nature. But this has not always been the case. In fact, as Emily Brady argues in her study *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, the original concept attributed to the ancient philosopher Dionysius Longinus was primarily concerned with elevated language and its effects on the mind,[13] and thus, as a rhetorical phenomenon, was very distinct from the much later concept of the sublime in nature. The rhetorical sublime (often referred to as the Longinian) was first introduced in *On Sublimity*, written around the first century AD. As Shaw observes, it served primarily as a persuasive device used in oratory.[14] Nevertheless, it is essential to answer what made this phenomenon sublime and how it was transformed into the natural sublime. Shaw suggests that rhetoric consistent with Longinus's descriptions of sublime language literally swept the listener or reader away with its power. Or, more specifically and quite disturbingly, they were "raped by the power of words."[15] There seem to be clear indications in this statement that some indescribable element is working toward

[12] Sara Heinämaa, "Disgust," in *The Routledge Handbook of Phenomenology of Emotions*, ed. Thomas Szanto and Hilge Landweer (London: Routledge, 2020), 383.
[13] Emily Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy: Aesthetics, Ethics, and Nature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 12.
[14] Shaw, *The Sublime*, 4.
[15] Shaw, *The Sublime*, 5.

the goal of persuasion, and there is presumably some unspecified force present that takes control of the subject. Thus, at this point, the sublime can already be recognized as something that cannot be understood or even explained. However, it may seem that the concept is far from being related to nature. In his treatise, Longinus describes the use of figures of speech in order to achieve the rhetorical sublime, but he also asserts that "nature is on the whole a law unto herself in matters of emotion and elevation, she [nature] is not a random force and does not work altogether without method."[16] He then describes five different sources of the sublime. As Robert Doran notes in *The Theory of the Sublime from Longinus to Kant*, Longinus considers the first two sources to be natural – "strong emotion" and "grand conceptions" – while the other are derived from skill or art.[17] Thus, in the rhetorical sublime, nature may not be a direct source of the sublime, but rather a force through which the sublime can emerge with the help of various devices.

While the rhetorical sublime has been described as a concept primarily concerned with language, the natural sublime rather deals with aesthetic experience and the feelings connected with it. When describing the crucial differences between the two concepts, Shaw observes that "[w]here the 'rhetorical Sublime' focuses on the grand or elevated as an aspect of language, the 'natural Sublime' regards sublimity as a quality inherent in the external world."[18] Thus, the concept of the natural sublime moves away from exploring the sublimity of language used in oratory and instead focuses on the sources of the sublime in the surrounding world, especially in nature, and describing the subsequent sublime experience through poetry. In *A Miscellany of Ingenious Thoughts and Reflections* (1721), Tamworth Reresby also observes this shift, stating that "a bare imitation of nature constitutes the sublime of orators; and the imitation of what is above nature, the sublime of poets. For it will not be disputed, I believe, that there goes into the composition of poetry, something supernatural and divine."[19] Therefore, instead of focusing on the description and imitation of nature itself, the poets of the time sought to analyze the effect of nature in a written poetic form. In contrast to Longinus's oral discourse, which took place face to face with a live audience, this shift in media represents an important step in the development of the sublime. As Marshall McLuhan famously stated in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, "the medium is the message. This is merely to say that the personal and

[16] Longinus, *On Sublimity*, ed. and trans. D. A. Russell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 2.
[17] Robert Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime from Longinus to Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 58.
[18] Shaw, *The Sublime*, 28.
[19] Tamworth Reresby, "A Miscellany of Ingenious Thoughts and Reflections," in *The Sublime: A Reader in British Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 43–44.

social consequences of any medium […] result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology."[20] Therefore, new technologies and new types of media can influence societies and their thoughts, and consequently shape aesthetic experiences, including the category of the sublime. The first important shift from the Longinian rhetorical sublime to the written medium of poetry in the eighteenth century is the first sign of how different types of media can shape its content and the aesthetic experience that emerges from it. While in oral culture and the associated discipline of oratory, the sublime functioned to impact live audiences through powerful language, later developments and new technologies led to the emergence of print culture, which allowed the sublime to reach a wider audience and reshape the aesthetic category. As Reresby noted at the time, and as quoted above, poets worked with the sublime in analyzing and describing the transcendent qualities of nature, which led to a change in both the sources of the sublime and the aspects associated with it. As will be discussed in due course, the sources of the sublime experience in nature can be diverse, ranging from static objects, such as the starry sky, to vast spaces, such as oceans, mountains, or deserts, to eventful and even threatening entities, such as an earthquake. In addition, another significant shift in the media used to produce the sublime will be discussed later in this chapter.[21]

At this juncture, it is important to note that it took some seventeen centuries until the rhetoric sublime was finally transformed into the natural sublime. Only in 1554 did Longinus's *On Sublimity* become available in Latin, and thanks to Nicolas Boileau's French translation published in 1674, the concept of the sublime became known at least in some circles. One of the pioneers that were likely influenced by this first translation was English dramatist and critic John Dennis who first described his encounters with the sublime while on the Grand Tour across the Alps. As James Buzard explains, Grand Tours were ideological journeys for upper-class young men, usually "occurring just after completion of studies at Oxford or Cambridge University and running anywhere from one to five years in length."[22] Therefore, John Dennis, together with other ruling class noblemen of the time such as Anthony Ashley-Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, were able to embark on such journeys, and became one of the first to describe the sublime experience in nature. In his *Miscellanies* (1693), Dennis explains that the beauty of

[20] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1994), 7.
[21] The previous three paragraphs were drafted in Jakub Fousek, "'The Sublime' in David Lynch's Work" (Bachelor Thesis, University of Pardubice, 2023), 11–14. https://hdl.handle.net/10195/80849.
[22] James Buzard, "The Grand Tour and After (1660–1840)," in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 38.

the Alpine nature is a "delight that is consistent with Reason" and contrasts it with other aesthetic experiences he encountered on his journey that were "mingled with horrours, and sometimes almost with despair,"[23] which, as will soon be discussed, he defines in his later writings as the sublime. Thus, the Grand Tours undertaken by Dennis, Shaftesbury, Addison, and many others from the late seventeenth century onward allowed them to experience the extraordinary features of nature that had the power to astonish the subject's mind, likely producing a strange amalgam of terror and pleasure. Moreover, as members of the educated upper class, these intellectuals could be among the select audience that Boileau's early French translation or the reproduced Latin original could reach, allowing them to become familiar with the concept. In this sense, the early sublime can be considered an elite discourse. However, as this paper will attempt to argue in the next chapters, some of the modern forms of this aesthetic category show tendencies to move from an elite discourse to the masses.

Some thinkers of the time believed that the sublime can emerge only when the subject encounters something outside of ordinary life. One of them was previously mentioned Dennis, who presented his own view in *The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry* (1701). Shaw points out that because Dennis lived in the Age of Enlightenment, he perceived nature as a "rational system" with regularities and rules. It is the irregular, which Dennis characterizes as "extravagances," that he believes triggers the sublime aesthetic experience, which he describes as filled with terror and horror.[24] Therefore, as a neoclassicist, Dennis emphasizes reason, and for him the sublime is triggered by objects that are somehow outside the rational system of nature. Nonetheless, Dennis attempts to transcend the boundaries of the rational and explore the thought processes behind the sublime. In *The Advancement*, he observes: "[s]o that take the Cause and the Effects together, and you have the Sublime."[25] Therefore, according to Dennis, the experience of the sublime is not possible without the cooperation of the object and the subject. In other words, when one is astonished by the power of the sublime object, neither the object nor the subject is predominant in the creation of the sublime aesthetic experience. Rather, the two play equal and complementary roles in producing it. Dennis explores this idea further in his subsequent study *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry* (1704), where he compares the sublime to passion. Dennis makes a distinction between "ordinary passion," which is initiated

[23] John Dennis, *Miscellanies in Verse and Prose a Quote* (London: James Knapton, 1693; Ann Arbor: Text Creation Partnership, 2011), 138–139, accessed February 1, 2025, https://name.umdl.umich.edu/A35672.0001.001.
[24] Shaw, *The Sublime*, 31.
[25] John Dennis, *The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry* (London: Rich. Parker, 1701; Ann Arbor: Text Creation Partnership, 2011), 47, accessed February 3, 2025, http://name.umdl.umich.edu/004890743.0001.000.

by the objects themselves, and "enthusiasm," which occurs when subjects begin to reflect deeply about a certain object.[26] While the former emerges from everyday objects and may be easily understood by the subject, the latter is outside of everyday life and may be beyond the subject's ability to understand. Thus, according to Dennis, both the object and the subject are equal in creating the sublime experience, but it can only emerge and have an impact when the subject contemplates an extraordinary object outside of everyday life. However, as this paper will attempt to argue, this may not be the case with some modern forms of the sublime, where there is likely to be a tendency to move from the extraordinary to the mundane. Moreover, as Robert Doran confirms,[27] Dennis's emphasis on the sublime as full of terror and horror opened a new stage in which the sublime and the beautiful are treated separately.

Before delving into a major treatise exploring the distinction between the sublime and the beautiful, it is essential to examine the observations of another eighteenth-century theorist. In Joseph Addison's series of essays known as "The Pleasure of the Imagination," published periodically in *The Spectator* (1711–12), he notes that the sources of the sublime could include objects such as wide sea, vast desert or enormous mountains and every other object "where we are not struck with the Novelty or Beauty of the Sight, but with that rude kind of Magnificence."[28] In saying so, Addison is making one of the first crucial distinctions between the beautiful and the sublime (which he terms "Magnificence"). Later in his treatise he asserts that one's imagination "loves to be filled with an Object" that is beyond one's ability to understand, and that as a result the subject is astonished and subsequently feels "a delightful Stillness and Amazement in the Soul."[29] This love that Addison mentions corresponds with the aforementioned subject's desire to be impacted, confirms the claim that the sublime can be understood as means of impacting the subject, and leaves room for the discussion of the subject's fascination with repulsive objects that will come in due course. In addition, Addison classifies some of the more catastrophic sources of sublimity, such as earthquakes and storms, as subject to a certain "reflection." In these cases, the sublime aesthetic experience is triggered not only by the powerful objects, but also by the pleasure "we receive from the Sense of our own Safety."[30] Thus, when the subject observes a terrifying object from a distance, the terror is

[26] John Dennis, *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry* (London: Geo. Strahan and Bernard Lintott, 1704; Ann Arbor: Text Creation Partnership, 2011), 15–20, accessed February 3, 2025, http://name.umdl.umich.edu/004844084.0001.000.
[27] Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime*, 139.
[28] Joseph Addison, *The Spectator* 412 (June 23, 1712), accessed February 6, 2025, https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/12030.
[29] Addison, *The Spectator* 412.
[30] Joseph Addison, *The Spectator* 418 (June 30, 1712), accessed February 6, 2025, https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/12030.

able to transform into the sublime aesthetic experience. This element of distance plays a crucial role in the emergence of the sublime. Without it, the sublime tends to turn into mere fear because the encounter directly involves the subject and poses a potential threat. Finally, it is important to note that the element of distance encompasses more than just space; it also involves emotional distance and the distance produced by fiction. As will be discussed in due course, the underlying element of distance also seems to be one of the links between the sublime and its modern forms or other closely related aesthetic categories. Furthermore, Dennis's and Addison's categorization of sublime objects will provide an essential framework for the exploration of the shift from the extraordinary to the everyday, and from intellectual discourse to the masses.

At this juncture, it is imperative to focus on a crucial work on the sublime, from which its modern forms still derive. Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) provides an important foundation for the analysis of this aesthetic category. Burke states that the sublime is found in anything that is "in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror" and asserts that the sublime is "the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling."[31] Much like Dennis, whose work illustrated the negative feeling arising from the sublime, Burke elaborates on this idea and treats the beautiful and the sublime as two distinct categories. For Burke, the sublime is "terrible" and "founded on pain," while the beautiful is based "on pleasure."[32] However, this leads to another important distinction that Burke makes from his contemporaries. In his detailed inquiries into the thought processes behind the aesthetic experience of the sublime, Burke expands on Dennis's observation that the object and subject play equal roles in the creation of the sublime, and determines that one is predominant. To analyze the emotion behind the sublime, Burke uses "astonishment," defining it as an emotion that fills the mind with horror. He states that when this occurs, the mind is so completely occupied with the given object that it cannot ponder anything else, causing "terror" or fear, and possibly inducing the accompanying aesthetic experience of the sublime.[33] From this it can be observed that in Burkean sublime, it is the subject that is dominant, since the subject's terror is the main element that produces it. Thus, the object first initiates the experience of the sublime, but the subject's mind has to consequently resort to terror, from which the feeling of the sublime

[31] Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, 36.
[32] Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry,* 113.
[33] Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry,* 53.

only then emerges. Moreover, this corresponds to the previously described reader-response theory, in which the subject always assumes the main role.[34]

Before delving into the specific modern forms of the sublime and new approaches towards this aesthetic phenomenon, it is crucial to focus on another very closely related category of the grotesque. As Harold Bloom points out, the grotesque is based on the word *grotto*, which signifies an underground cave that is, as he observes, metaphorically infested with unknown forces.[35] Hence, it already becomes clear that there may be a parallel between the grotesque and the sublime experience, which is often also described as based upon an incomprehensible force. Moreover, Bloom observes that the primary emotion that characterizes the grotesque is astonishment, the same emotion that forms the sublime experience, but it also features a certain distaste and is not transcendent as the sublime is.[36] Therefore, the two categories have a common denominator in the form of a feeling that they are able to induce. While the sublime astonishment can be described as lofty and boundless, the grotesque rather astonishes the subject by the means of aversion or even disgust.

However, there is a lack of consensus about what specifically constitutes the grotesque. David Cruickshank confirms that the definition of grotesque is "still indeterminate, suggesting a wider problem with our conception of what the grotesque is and does" and that "[n]o two critics or eras have had identical definitions of the word."[37] Thus, it could be argued that its indeterminacy is a crucial part of its definition, and that similarly as the sublime, it could reach beyond the abilities of reason and comprehension. Moreover, Wolfgang Kayser asserts that "the grotesque world is – and is not – our own,"[38] and that the "familiar and harmonious world is alienated under the impact of abysmal forces."[39] Consequently, it may be said that the grotesque is based on what could be labelled the real world, but due to effect of immeasurable forces it may become contrary to reason and appear as beyond human control. Furthermore, Mikhail Bakhtin points out that the grotesque is based on degradation which deconstructs the everyday normal life and degrades everything that is spiritual, high, abstract or ideal.[40] Thus, as previously discussed in relation to Bloom's observations, the sublime and the grotesque are

[34] The previous three paragraphs were drafted in Fousek, "'The Sublime' in David Lynch's Work," 15–17.
[35] Harold Bloom, ed., *The Grotesque* (New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2009), xv.
[36] Ibid.
[37] David Cruickshank, *The Grotesque Modernist Body*: *Gothic Horror and Carnival Satire in Art and Writing* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), 5.
[38] Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, trans. Ulrich Weisstein (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), 31.
[39] Kayser, *The Grotesque,* 37.
[40] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 19.

both based on similar modes of astonishment. However, while the former is not so frequently induced by very intensely negative aesthetics and is rather transcendent, the latter operates with everyday objects transformed into degraded, abnormal, foul or distasteful, but with a similar resulting aesthetic experience. Cruickshank asserts that "[a]s a stylistic device, the grotesque takes familiar objects and concepts and, in combining them in chimerical fashion, makes new and alien objects, things which do not yet have names and categories to describe them."[41] Therefore, the sublime aesthetic experience can be considered as a very intense subject's response that can be triggered by the use of the grotesque as a stylistic device for describing various everyday objects. Moreover, the grotesque makes it possible to create new and unknown objects, which, through the effect of their novelty and the lack of any previous experience, may allow the subject to resort to the feeling of the sublime.

Some critics also claim that the grotesque is ambivalent. For instance, Geoffrey Galt Harpham notes that the grotesque is able to provoke both horror and humor, and that this contradiction and clash between two differing categories causes the subject's mind to ponder the object with uncertainty, causing the grotesque experience to arise.[42] Even in this case, there may be a parallel between the sublime and the grotesque. Although not discussed in this thesis, theorists such as Slavoj Žižek[43] focus on the phenomenon of *from the sublime to the ridiculous* (often also called *bathos* in literary theory), which explores the thin line between the contradictory categories of the magnificent and noble and the laughable or trivial. Therefore, the ambivalent nature of the grotesque and the effects it may have on the subject are not unlike those that constitute the sublime experience.

In addition, as previously noted in connection with Burke's treatise, the sublime requires the element of distance to transform from mere fear to the sublime aesthetic experience. As Cruickshank remarks, [h]orror arises from being in close proximity to grotesquery and causes us to recoil from it, whilst humour arises from distancing ourselves from the source of the grotesque."[44] Thus, similarly as the sublime can transform from fear and arise only when the subject is distant from the source, the grotesque shifts from horror to laughter based on distance. It could be said that the pleasurable part of both these aesthetic modes occurs only when the subject is not directly threatened by the object. Therefore, distance not only helps to transform

[41] Cruickshank, *The Grotesque*, 7.
[42] Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982) 5–11.
[43] Slavoj Zizek, *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime: On David Lynch's Lost Highway* (Seattle: The University of Washington Press, 2000).
[44] Cruickshank, *The Grotesque*, 9.

fear into a feeling of negative pleasure described as the sublime, but also to transform horror to pleasurable humor in the grotesque. Hence, the prerequisite element of distance is another point that both these categories have in common.

Nevertheless, while humor is generally not a mode of the sublime, there is still another parallel between the pleasures that arise from the sublime and grotesque aesthetic experiences. In particular, immediately after encountering a sublime or grotesque object, the subject is likely to feel a negative emotion of either horror or terror. However, when the element of distance is also present and the subject feels remote from the object, these negative emotions have the potential to turn into astonishment, which could be described as an amalgam of the contradicting positive and negative emotions. Then, the question arises as to how the gap between a negative and a positive experience can be so small that such negative pleasures, caused by the grotesque or the sublime, can emerge. The answer may lie in Julia Kristeva's elaborate concept of abjection. Initially, Kristeva defines abject as something that is part of the self, but although rejected, it cannot be entirely separated from self.[45] Thus, the concept of abjection is likely to be very closely related to the human body, similarly as the grotesque and some modern forms of the sublime. According to Cruickshank, the abject blurs categories and makes the world and human bodies themselves completely strange and unfamiliar.[46] Thus, in its effect, the abject also becomes contrary to reason and possibly culminates into aesthetic experiences that the human mind cannot fully grasp. However, the inexplicable nature of this concept and relation between the subject and the abject is precisely what may assist in understanding the amalgamative negative pleasures arising from the sublime and the grotesque. Samantha Pentony observes that humans are both attracted to and repulsed by the abject; terror and adrenaline acknowledge its existence, and nausea signifies biological awareness of it.[47] Therefore, this strange attraction towards that which should be rejected may be an explanation for why a subject encountering an object of terror or horror may ascend into the sublime or other ambivalent aesthetic experience of such intensity. Kristeva clarifies that a major aspect of the abject is a sensation of *jouissance* (a kind of enjoyment that is not necessarily enjoyable) in which "the subject is swallowed up but in which the Other [anything different from oneself], in return, keeps the subject from foundering by making it repugnant. One thus understands why so many victims of the abject are its fascinated victims—if not its submissive and willing

[45] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 11–13.
[46] Cruickshank, *The Grotesque*, 9.
[47] Samantha Pentony, "Kristeva's Theory of Abjection," *Deep South* 2, no. 3 (Spring 1996), https://www.otago.ac.nz/deepsouth/vol2no3/pentony.html.

ones."[48] Hence, the ambivalent feeling of jouissance that follows from the encounter with the abject can be described as a certain fascination. Despite the abject being repugnant or otherwise rejected by the subject, it still has the power to grasp and take control of its mind, while the repugnance allows the subject to keep in touch with the real. Consequently, it can be said that the abject, as an attraction towards the repugnant or rejected, comprises both parts of the ambivalent negative pleasures that often result from the sublime or the grotesque.

However, the important question of how something repulsive can be aesthetic remains to be answered. While it seems illogical to ascribe aesthetic value to objects that people generally reject, there may be a place for it in the contemporary sense. In her study *Everyday Aesthetics*, Katya Mandoki observes:

> That someone can watch death, pain, or a conflagration as a spectacle and feel pleasure is, unfortunately, a fact. The proof is their repeated display in films and television. This attraction to the tragic in real life explains the crowds that gather at traffic accidents or similar events, the repeated transmission of tragic and violent images in the mass media and even the existence of something as monstrous as snuff. This attraction, perverse or not, amoral or immoral, is aesthetic, embarrassing as it may be.[49]

Therefore, as Mandoki notes, despite its immoral or perverse nature, the fascination with various repulsive objects and events has aesthetic value. One of the main pieces of evidence she mentions is its frequent presentation in television and films. As the analysis in the second part of this paper will attempt to demonstrate, this attraction and aesthetic value can also stem from literature. In addition to Mandoki, other aestheticians such as Emily Brady[50] also argue that repulsive objects have aesthetic value. In this context, it is important to note that negative aesthetics is not an entirely new phenomenon, and that certain parallels to today's view of this category and attraction to the repulsive can be traced back to the Baroque or even the Renaissance. For example, Hieronymus Bosch's depiction of hell in *The Garden of Earthly Delights* or the series of *Black Paintings*, such as *Saturn Devouring His Son*, by the late Baroque artist Francisco Goya both show signs of an attraction to the repulsive. However, Mandoki states that aestheticians in the past have generally addressed art and beauty as privileged, while rejecting the aesthetic value of anything tragic or repulsive. She also asserts that the pleasure arising from the tragic requires sensitive appraisal and that while such objects or events are repugnant and the pleasure arising from them immoral, it should still be an object of inquiry for

[48] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 9.
[49] Katya Mandoki, *Everyday Aesthetics: Prosaics, the Play of Culture and Social Identities* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 40.
[50] Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, 179–182.

aestheticians.[51] Hence, when the subject feels touched or anyway impacted by the repulsive object or situation, it becomes aesthetic despite its immorality. As previously discussed, this attraction or pleasure arising from the repulsive may likely be closely connected to Kristeva's concept of abjection, which focuses precisely on the fascination aroused by something generally rejected. Moreover, this chapter previously identified that the categories of the sublime and the grotesque share similar aspects regarding its ambivalent effects on the subject, as intense aesthetic experiences with negative pleasures arising from them. In addition, because of the focus on the human body and other mundane objects, these observations also indicate a shift from an elite discourse towards the everyday that will be analyzed in due course. Lastly, based on the findings from multiple explored viewpoints focused on the aesthetic value of repulsive objects or events, it can be determined that aesthetic experiences involving emotions such as disgust or repugnance are viable for analysis in this paper.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the sublime experience often has its foundations in fear or terror. However, one of the modern approaches to the aesthetic category of the sublime forms its counterpart, which is based on disgust rather than terror and is closely related to the grotesque. As Carolyn Korsmeyer observes in her essay "Fear and Disgust: the Sublime and the Sublate," the sublime founded upon disgust is of similar importance, intensity and meaning; it is capable of creating a comparable experience of a negative pleasure, which Korsmeyer terms "the sublate."[52] Korsmeyer further adds that disgust has lately received much attention in both cinema criticism and philosophical psychology studies.[53] Therefore, in some modern works of fiction and cinema, the source of the Burkean sublime of terror gradually transforming into awe and thrill could be replaced by Korsmeyer's sublate of disgust or appear alongside it.

This adds a new dimension to the perception of the sublime as a way of impacting the subject, although the two aesthetic modes function differently. It could be said that it allows similar aesthetic qualities to be identified not only in objects instilling terror but also in objects inducing disgust. Aurel Kolnai asserts that disgust is frequently triggered by the so-called bodily senses of smell or taste, and some of the elicitors include contaminated foods, lower-order animals such as swarms of rats or insects, bodily products like vomit, mucus, pus, and excrement, violations of the body envelope such as evisceration, disfiguring wounds or mutilation, and gore; and decay and rot of flesh connected with it.[54] However, such objects

[51] Mandoki, *Everyday Aesthetics*, 41–42.
[52] Carolyn Korsmeyer, "Fear and Disgust: The Sublime and the Sublate," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 62, no. 246 (4) (2008): 367, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23961193.
[53] Korsmeyer, "Fear and Disgust," 368.
[54] Aurel Kolnai, *On Disgust*, eds. Barry Smith and Carolyn Korsmeyer (Chicago: Open Court, 2004), 43–44.

cannot initiate the sublate experience on their own. While the Burkean sublime requires a degree of distance (whether physical or psychological) in order to be no longer perceived as a threat, according to Korsmeyer, disgust is rather connected with contamination, which is gradual and threatens the subject only in the longer term.[55] Therefore, the element of distance may still partly help to transform disgust into a sublate negative pleasure, but at the same time, disgust transcends the distance and somehow adheres to the recipient. Korsmeyer observes that when disgust emerges with the sublate, it does not allow the audience to feel superior and removed from the disgusting object, but rather forces them to contemplate their material existence, thereby allowing the sublate aesthetic experience to emerge.[56] Thus, the sublime and the sublate function in different ways. While the former requires fear and distance as a prerequisite, the latter operates much more intimately with the subject's body, allowing the emotion of disgust to be transformed into the experience of the sublate. Korsmeyer supports this by relating these two aesthetic categories to death – in the case of the sublime, fear or terror operates to signify imminent destruction or human powerlessness, whereas the sublate disgust implies putrefaction, dismemberment, and the disintegration of bodies, which apprehends reduction rather than destruction.[57] Hence, the two aesthetic categories are based on two different levels of human existence that complement each other. Korsmeyer observes that the sublime is spiritual, uplifting, and exalted, while the sublate is physical and intimate, recognizing the lowest common factor of living beings, and that just as the sublime is not experienced as terror, disgust may not be perceived as such in the experience of the sublate.[58] Therefore, it can be concluded that the sublime experience arises as a result of some immeasurable power beyond human comprehension that poses the threat of immediate destruction. As its counterpart, the sublate threatens the audience with the vulnerability of their material existence that humans naturally comprehend, suggesting the danger of its slow, gradual disintegration.

As the example of the sublate indicates, along with the various modern forms of the sublime also came a change in the media and objects used to convey it. The objects that initiate the aesthetic experience of the sublime can now include artificial, man-made structures, or even digital content that allows for the representation of the unrepresentable. The types of media used to convey the sublime can currently include photographs, television footage, and cinematic

[55] Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Savoring Disgust: The Foul and the Fair in Aesthetics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 134.
[56] Korsmeyer, *Savoring Disgust*, 157.
[57] Korsmeyer, "Fear and Disgust," 374.
[58] Korsmeyer, "Fear and Disgust," 379.

material. This transformation in relation to modern forms marks another significant shift in media; the focus now shifts from written works of art to technological advances such as film or photography. In *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects,* McLuhan states that "[s]ocieties have always been shaped more by the nature of the media by which men communicate than by the content of the communication."[59] Thus, the medium can influence the content and, beyond that, the whole society and its mindset. Therefore, the media type plays a central role and is in some ways superior to the content. In relation to the object of inquiry of this paper, this implies that the shifts in media types can affect the aesthetic category of the sublime and possibly reshape its sources and possibilities of emergence.

One of the modern forms that illustrate such change in objects and media is the technological sublime, which focuses on finding sublime qualities in scientific progress and man-made structures. As Rowan Wilken asserts, the Internet and other new technologies that can now trigger the sublime experience prove the similarity between human engagement with nature and engagement with technology, and that "[f]rom the eighteenth century up to the present, a clear trajectory runs from the natural sublime to the 'technological sublime.'"[60] Therefore, similarly to sublime objects of nature, this aesthetic experience can also be produced by new technologies that astonish the subject. Furthermore, Davie E. Nye notes that technological sublime includes objects like railroads, skyscrapers, and even atomic bombs.[61] Thus, it can be said that this modern form of the sublime deals primarily with the aesthetic experience produced by technological advancement, while new media may allow to represent the possibilities and results of this advancement. Emily Brady observes that "[i]nstead of being humbled by nature's sublimity, something we cannot fully grasp, skyscrapers shock our senses, push imagination beyond its limits in trying to take in such size, and make us feel small, yet without a consciousness of this other thing as non-human."[62] Therefore, in the technological sublime, the recipients are aware that the objects are man-made or are the result of human technological progress. In this case, the feeling of the sublime may be more a result of the unknown scale and possibilities of technological advancement. In her *Metamorphoses of the Sublime*, Kamila Vránková suggests that the technological sublime has its roots in the "fascination with the enormous potential of human intellect" and represents a transformation of

[59] Marshall McLuhan, and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects* (Corte Madera: Ginkgo Press, 2005), 8.
[60] Rowan Wilken, "Unthinkable Complexity": The Internet and the Mathematical Sublime," in *The Sublime Today: Contemporary Readings in the Aesthetic*, ed. Gillian Borland Pierce (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 192.
[61] David E. Nye, *American Technological Sublime* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), xi.
[62] Emily Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, 144.

the sources of sublimity from the divine power of nature to human technology.[63] However, as she further explains, "[i]n the course of the 20th century, enthusiasm for the possibilities offered by new technologies has transformed into fear of technology as a hostile force that both controls and threatens us."[64] Therefore, when the subject encounters an object of technology powerful enough to produce an intense aesthetic experience of the sublime, they are likely to find themselves in the grip of the characteristically ambivalent emotion associated with it. In this case, however, the sublime experience is likely to be an amalgam of the positive fascination and appreciation of human intellect and the negative terror arising from the unknown magnitude and danger associated with technology as a hostile force that controls and threatens humans.

Nevertheless, the modern forms of the sublime seem to be perpetually changing, and this aesthetic experience can currently arise even from digital media and hypermedia. Yi-Hui Huang points out that the concept of the digital sublime focuses on the newest digital media and ways of using a computer and other digital means to represent the "unpresentable."[65] Thus, thanks to technological progress, it is currently possible to represent qualities that were previously unrepresentable, especially through new media such as film. Jeffrey Pence observes that "[a]s a medium […] movies reenact for our reflection the process of framing by which the infinite possibilities of sensory perception and interpretation come together in a pragmatically coherent entity (the world)."[66] Therefore, while the medium of film allows the author to represent new qualities and create unknown worlds with a multitude of possibilities, the subject's interpretation and aesthetic experience must still be based on the world as they know it. This correlates directly with the reader-response theory discussed earlier, according to which the lack of awareness that meaning is created in the mind contributes to the intensity of the aesthetic experience, but conversely, in order to analyze the experience, the subject must be aware of the medium and the fact that it is one's own response. In addition, Nikita Mathias notes that

> cinema is also able to confront the spectator with sensations of such affective intensity that even the last residue of media awareness can be temporarily suspended. […] Based on the interplay between immersion and media reflexivity as well as cinema's general ability to present and represent the dynamic procedures of subjectivity, the medium cinema can swiftly shift between facilitating intense experiences of the sublime and

[63] Kamila Vránková, *Metamorphoses of the Sublime: From Ballads and Gothic Novels to Contemporary Anglo-American Children´s Literature* (České Budějovice: Jihočeská univerzita v Českých Budějovicích, 2019), 44.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Yi-Hui Huang, "The Digital Sublime: Lessons from Kelli Connell's *Double Life*," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 46, no. 4 (2012): 70, https://doi.org/10.5406/jaesteduc.46.4.0070.
[66] Jeffrey Pence, "Cinema of the Sublime: Theorizing the Ineffable," *Poetics Today* 25, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 61.

> enabling reflections on these experiences. Cinema both presents the sublime and represents it as an act of experience.[67]

Hence, films and other cinematic material allow the subject to encounter intense aesthetic experiences such as the sublime, and at the same time reflect upon them. The aspect that facilitates the emergence of such experiences is immersion (which applies to both film and literature and will be discussed in due course). However, as Mathias points out above, immersion can only be temporary, and the cinematic medium then allows the subject to reflect upon and analyze his or her aesthetic experience. Furthermore, Emily Brady suggests that "the forcefulness is determined by the medium, so that we have, say, a literary or poetic sublime, rather than an original sublime."[68] Thus, as illustrated, the art form, medium, and new technology can shape the sublime and create different derivations that use distinct methods to achieve the aesthetic experience of the sublime. As the following analysis will attempt to show, this may also correlate with McLuhan's thesis "the medium is the message,"[69] which establishes the relationship between the type of medium and the content of the message.

Moreover, in addition to this link between new media and the new ways of conveying this aesthetic experience, the digital sublime can also represent another transformation in the sources it can arise from. As Vincent Mosco asserts, the sublime aesthetic experience can now arise from the Internet or cyberspace, and that just as poets in the past were astonished by the majestic Alpine range, people nowadays can encounter similar experiences in relation to the newest technological advancements.[70] He also confirms that a degree of Burkean terror is still present in the experience, especially in relation to the evil and unknown scale of technological progress.[71] Therefore, the digital sublime can refer to the new and infinite possibilities of representation together with technological advancements as its modern objects, still consisting of both positive and negative emotions. Rowan Wilken observes that in the experience of digital sublime, the Internet and other modern technology resists and evades rational comprehension.[72] Hence, the aesthetic experience of digital sublime is likely to be closely linked with the overwhelming feeling of smallness and incomprehension in relation to new technology. Moreover, the digital sublime constitutes another step onwards from the technological sublime.

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[67] Nikita Mathias, *Disaster Cinema in Historical Perspective: Mediations of the Sublime* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020), 147.
[68] Emily Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, 130.
[69] McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 7.
[70] Vincent Mosco, *The Digital Sublime: Myth, Power, and Cyberspace* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 23–24.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Wilken, "Unthinkable Complexity," 207.

While the latter is primarily concerned with the shift to modern objects, the former also encompasses new possibilities of representation of the unknown. In the context of reader-response theory, it can be said that the subject may now become immersed in an unfamiliar world, leading to a sense of the unknown, and subsequently to an astonishing experience of the digital sublime on the verge of terror. In addition, as the second part of this paper will show, the digital sublime can also be applied to modern television series or films, in which the unpresentable can also be presented, often working toward a sense of the sublime arising from the unknown scale of technological progress.

In conclusion, the chapter delineated various traditional and modern forms of the sublime, discussed key differences between them, and compared the concept of the sublate to the grotesque, drawing parallels between the two categories. Furthermore, the chapter identified shifts in the objects and media used to convey the sublime, illustrating that McLuhan's famous statement that "the medium is the message"[73] may apply to this aesthetic category, and concluding that the type of media has an impact on the aesthetic experience of the recipient and the way in which the sublime is conveyed. In addition, the discussion of reader-response theory and Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection has provided an important framework for the subsequent analysis of literary and cinematic material, asserting that the sublime can be perceived as a way of impacting the recipient.

[73] McLuhan, *Understanding Media,* 7.

2. ENCOUNTERS WITH THE SUBLATE

In modern literary and cinematic material, the aesthetic category of the sublime operates with different objects and is based on different aspects than traditional concepts. The first main goal of this analytical chapter is to determine whether the concept of the sublime, specifically the sublime experience arising from disgust, can appear in modern works of art. Second, the chapter aims to elaborate on the elements of immersion, distance, and indeterminacy of texts as stimuli for interpretation. Then, Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) is introduced. The chapter aims to analyze selected passages from the novel and attempts to identify modern forms of the sublime arising from disgust. Moreover, the chapter focuses on the analysis of a selection of scenes from *The Fly* (1986) by the Canadian film director David Cronenberg. In this part of the chapter, a parallel is drawn between the sublime and the grotesque, identifying how the sublime experience of disgust and body horror is represented in cinematic material.

As previously mentioned in the first chapter, one of the modern forms of the sublime experience based on fear or terror is the concept of the sublate defined by Carolyn Korsmeyer, which has its source in disgust rather than terror. For the purposes of this analysis, it is crucial to first delineate the individual objects and events in which disgust can emerge. In his groundbreaking study *On Disgust*, Aurel Kolnai observed that "[t]he prototypical object of disgust is […] the range of phenomena associated with putrefaction. This includes corruption of living bodies, decomposition, dissolution, the odor of corpses, in general the transition of the living into the state of death."[74] Therefore, according to Kolnai, the key elements are bodily senses associated with putrefaction. However, the disgust-inducing objects themselves are unlikely to initiate an experience of sublime intensity on their own. As Korsmeyer argues,

> [j]ust as the sublime is not experienced as fear, so in the complex, layered apprehensions of the sublate disgust may not be experienced as such. But the aesthetic affect gains intensity from the hallmark visceral repulsion of disgust - a somatic spasm that registers the inescapable, dolorous frailty of material existence.[75]

Therefore, in order for the sublate to emerge, the objects must first induce disgust as a prerequisite. However, the sublate experience may not be experienced as disgust *per se*, but rather as an intense bodily reaction that is likely to remind the audience of the vulnerability of their material nature, with effects of a similar negative pleasure as the sublime experience.

Before analyzing specific encounters with the sublate, it is crucial to introduce two essential elements that facilitate the emergence of aesthetic experience in its fullness. In order

[74] Kolnai, *On Disgust*, 53.
[75] Korsmeyer, "Fear and Disgust," 379.

to do so, it is first necessary to place them in the context of a specific novel. In Cormac McCarthy's novel *The Road*, the audience is plunged into a story about two unnamed father-son characters ("the man" and "the boy") and their terrifying journey through a post-apocalyptic landscape. The cause of the apocalypse, the setting of the story and the date are never explicitly mentioned. Even punctuation is absent for most of the novel, adding an extra dimension of interpretive possibility. As Rosenblatt points out, an important question in the so-called transactional reader-response theory is how exactly the indeterminacy of the text functions as a stimulus for interpretation.[76] Thus, it could be argued that the lack of explicit information about the characters and the setting can be interpreted as a sign of a certain universality and a potential source of uncertainty, concern or even fear for the reader. Since the story is not closely tied to specific people or places, the reader can easily identify with it and thus become fully immersed in it. This element of immersion is the first key concept that can help the aesthetic experience emerge. As Marie-Laure Ryan observes in *Narrative as Virtual Reality*, "immersion is the experience through which a fictional world acquires the presence of an autonomous, language-independent reality populated with live human beings."[77] In this regard, it could be said that when the audience gets immersed in the text, it is likely to intensify their aesthetic experience to the extent that they feel in the grip of something beyond their understanding, perhaps experiencing the "strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling."[78] Thus, it could be argued that the element of immersion facilitates the emergence of aesthetic experience, be it the sublate or the sublime, and helps to intensify the perception of such an encounter.

However, immersion is only one facet of the matter. While it is the first significant element that helps the audience experience the sublate (or the sublime, for that matter), there is also the element of distance, mentioned earlier in the first chapter. Note that while the elements of distance and immersion may seem contradictory, they complement each other. Thomas Pavel emphasizes that

> [f]ictional worlds do use plausibility as props that attract us, entice us, persuade us to get immersed, but immersion is only one side of the game. Fiction's […] way of suggesting the distance between our actual world and the fictional one, the out-of-the-ordinary character of the "transport" that takes us there provide the other, equally essential, side of our involvement with fiction.[79]

[76] Rosenblatt, *The Reader*, 182.
[77] Marie-Laure Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2001), 14.
[78] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. Adam Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 36.
[79] Thomas Pavel, "Immersion and Distance in Fictional Worlds," *Itinéraires* 3, no. 1 (2010): 107, https://doi.org/10.4000/itineraires.2183.

The element of distance can thus be seen as an equally important counterpart to the immersion discussed earlier. In the context of the sublime, distance functions to transform terror into a sublime experience, as explained in the first chapter. Without physical or psychological distance, the terrifying object would pose a threat to the audience, causing them to experience only fear. Nevertheless, as Korsmeyer points out, "when disgust arises with the sublate it does not permit the subject to feel removed from and superior to the intentional object."[80] Hence, it could be argued that the element of psychological distance created by fiction helps prevent the audience from feeling directly threatened or frightened by the disgust-inducing object. What it does not do, however, is allow the audience to feel completely removed from the object, which is likely to remind them of the fragility of material existence through the intense, incomprehensible feeling of the sublate associated with death and the accompanying disgust.

As will become apparent in this chapter, the aesthetic category of the sublate is a device that contemporary authors within the scope of this analysis seem to employ in abundance. For example, in *The Road*, the characters are desperately searching for shelter and supplies when they discover an old trailer. This is where the element of immersion comes into play. As Ryan explains, "[f]or immersion to take place, the text must offer an expanse to be immersed within, and this expanse, in a blatantly mixed metaphor, is not an ocean but a textual world."[81] Thanks to the author's meticulous descriptions of the characters' emotions and the man's desperate attempts to keep his son alive, the reader is likely to get fully immersed in the story, which can help the aesthetic experience to emerge. First, the discovery of the trailer is likely to raise the reader's awareness and curiosity about its contents, which is soon revealed:

> [The man] clambered up over the windscreen to the roof of the cab. […] There was a skylight about a third of the way down the roof […]. The cover was gone and the inside of the trailer smelled of wet plywood and that sour smell he'd come to know. He […] got out his lighter and lit the papers and dropped them into the darkness. A faint whooshing. He wafted away the smoke and looked down into the trailer. The small fire burning in the floor seemed a long way down. He shielded the glare of it with his hand and when he did he could see almost to the rear of the box. Human bodies. Sprawled in every attitude. Dried and shrunken in their rotted clothes. The small wad of burning paper drew down to a wisp of flame and then died out leaving a faint pattern for just a moment in the incandescence like the shape of a flower, a molten rose. Then all was dark again.[82]

In this example, the reader's attention is likely first drawn to the sudden discovery of the trailer, which could be a life-saving find for the characters. Edmund Burke asserts that "[i]n every thing

[80] Korsmeyer, "Fear and Disgust," 379.
[81] Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality*, 90.
[82] Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 39–40.

[*sic*] sudden and unexpected, we are apt to start; that is, we have a perception of danger, and our nature rouses us to guard against it," and later in this section of his treatise notes that suddenness, among other elements, is capable of producing the sublime.[83] Thus, according to Burke, the element of suddenness has the power to produce an aesthetic experience of sublime intensity. However, another Burkean element comes into play when the man climbs onto the trailer and looks down into it. According to Burke, "darkness is more productive of sublime ideas than light."[84] Hence, the suddenly discovered trailer with unknown contents shrouded in darkness will likely intensify the reader's aesthetic experience even more. Then, when the man lights up the newspaper and drops it down, illuminating the interior of the trailer, the reader is likely to experience a sudden surge of disgust that could easily turn into the sublate of negative pleasure. First, the decomposing, already shrunken human bodies can indeed be perceived as disgust-inducing objects, and Kolnai confirms this: "[s]omething dead is never disgusting in its mere non-functioning […]. Rather, substantial decomposition is necessary, which must at least seem to put itself forward as a continuing process, almost as if it were after all just another manifestation of life."[85] Since the bodies in the example show an advanced stage of decomposition, an intense bodily reaction of disgust is well possible. Moreover, the putrefaction of the decomposing bodies in the example signifies not only death but also life. Kolnai stresses that the "[e]vidence of this is provided by the reinforced smell that accompanies putrefaction, the often glaring change of colors […]. It is not the living being as a whole that in dying becomes disgusting, but much more the body, in its parts: its 'flesh' for example."[86] While this may not be immediately apparent in the given example from *The Road*, the intense smell of putrefaction that Kolnai emphasizes is nonetheless mentioned as "the sour smell that he'd [the man] come to know."[87] While the reader is unlikely to realize at first that the sour smell refers to the stench of corpses, it can lead to a breath-holding apprehension that culminates into the sublate when the bodies are discovered.

In addition, the example also features some other important elements that Kolnai mentions here, such as the change in color and the decomposing flesh that are likely to evoke disgust, i.e., bodies that are "[d]ried and shrunken in their rotted clothes."[88] First, all of these depictions are likely to induce disgust in the reader. Then, because of the aforementioned

[83] Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry,* 76.
[84] Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry,* 73.
[85] Kolnai, *On Disgust*, 53.
[86] Kolnai, *On Disgust*, 53.
[87] McCarthy, *The Road*, 40.
[88] McCarthy, *The Road*, 40.

elements of suddenness and darkness, which Burke considers productive of an intense aesthetic experience, combined with the disgust induced by the rotting bodies that readers may feel while reading this section, it is likely to remind them of the fragility of material existence and thus be transformed into a feeling of incomprehensible smallness and insignificance of sublime intensity. Since its primary sources are disgust-inducing human corpses, it can be perceived as an encounter with the sublate. In Carolyn Korsmeyer's words,

> [n]o one is surprised to make this discovery [of the fragility of material existence]. But like so many existential truths, its magnitude slips through the mind and cannot be held. The sublate aspect of aesthetic disgust permits a moment of sustained recognition, providing a time to dwell upon mortality from a particularly intimate and fragile perspective.[89]

Thus, to conclude the analysis of this first example, the sublate is likely to produce effects comparable to those of the sublime. Although it is based on disgust rather than terror, it produces similarly incomprehensible emotional responses of human insignificance and transience, which may allow the reader to dwell on mortality as a reaction to an intense aesthetic experience. However, as will soon become apparent, Cormac McCarthy works with disgust on a much broader scale than is represented in this section of the novel.

Later in *The Road*, winter comes. It begins to snow, and the characters are starving and freezing. In the morning, after one of the countless nights spent in the woods with only a tarp to protect them from the snow, the characters see two men walking along the road. Slowly following their footsteps, they find themselves on the outskirts of a small town, where they discover an old, stately house. They think it is dangerous to enter, but they have no other choice. After listening for a while and seeing no footsteps near the house, the man and his son enter. They manage to find sleeping bags and clothes but no food whatsoever. But then, the man notices a hatch locked with a large padlock. From this point on, the reader's perception of what happens next might be similar to the previous example. At first, the readers' attention is likely to be drawn to the locked hatch, and they might wonder what is behind it and why it is locked. Soon, the man manages to break it open with a shovel and comes down the stairs:

> He ducked his head and then flicked the lighter and swung the flame out over the darkness like an offering. Coldness and damp. An ungodly stench. […] An old mattress darkly stained. He crouched and stepped down again and held out the light. Huddled against the back wall were naked people, male and female, all trying to hide, shielding their faces with their hands. On the mattress lay a man with his legs gone to the hip and the stumps of them blackened and burnt. The smell was hideous.

[89] Korsmeyer, *Savoring Disgust*, 158.

> Jesus, he whispered. Then one by one they turned and blinked in the pitiful light. Help us, they whispered. Please help us.
> Christ, he said. Oh Christ.
> He turned and grabbed the boy. Hurry, he said. […]
> A bearded face appeared blinking at the foot of the stairs. Please, he called. Please.[90]

In this example, the possible experience of the sublate is similar to that in the previous instance. Initially, the element of darkness described by Burke is present and is likely to lead the reader to an apprehension of what might be hidden in the dark cellar or what the purpose of locking it is in the first place. As Burke points out. "[t]o make any thing [*sic*] very terrible, obscurity seems in general to be necessary. When we know the full extent of any danger, when we can accustom our eyes to it, a great deal of the apprehension vanishes."[91] Thus, in this example, the darkness may also serve to obscure the contents of the cellar before the light reveals them to the reader. In this case, however, the apprehension may be much greater and more gradual since the cellar is larger than the trailer in the previous example, where its contents were revealed almost immediately. Before this revelation, however, there is also an intense smell of decay described as an "ungodly stench,"[92] which is likely to heighten the reader's apprehension and, as Kolnai's study helped to determine, evoke disgust as in the previous example. Thus, even before the most disgusting part is revealed, the reader may already feel that something sinister is lurking in the darkness of the basement. However, because the previously described Burkean element of darkness is currently taking place in a building, it operates in a different way. Burke observes that

> all edifices calculated to produce an idea of the sublime, ought rather to be dark and gloomy, and this for two reasons; the first is, that darkness itself on other occasions is known by experience to have a greater effect on the passions than light. The second is, that to make an object very striking, we should make it as different as possible from the objects with which we have been immediately conversant […].[93]

Therefore, in this case, the aesthetic experience is likely to be intensified by the fact that the dark basement is juxtaposed with the well-lit room where the hatch is located. Before the man uses his lighter to eliminate the darkness of the basement "like an offering,"[94] this contrast between the well-lit and pitch-black part of the building might further increase the reader's apprehension. As Burke notes in the section above, it could have a striking effect on the reader that soon culminates into a possible encounter with the sublate. Moreover, the juxtaposition of

[90] McCarthy, *The Road*, 93.
[91] Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry,* 54.
[92] McCarthy, *The Road*, 93.
[93] Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry,* 74.
[94] McCarthy, *The Road*, 93.

darkness and light is here combined with the aforementioned obscurity, and the sum of these effects is likely to soon bring the reader's apprehension and aesthetic experience to a climax.

As the characters descend the stairs, they discover that the basement is full of naked, locked up and frightened people. From this point on, the reader's apprehension is likely to reach its maximum and gradually transform into disgust. The first source of this conversion into the feeling of disgust may be the suddenly revealed number of human bodies in close proximity. As Kolnai observes in his treatise, "[t]he human body in proximity can also by itself arouse disgust. […] [I]t involves conditions or peculiarities of the body or bodily products that are acknowledged to be disgusting in themselves […]."[95] Therefore, the first stimulus that can lead to the feeling of disgust is the sudden discovery of several human beings in the vicinity. As Kolnai argues, the body itself can evoke disgust, mainly because it is naturally composed of bodily products, such as sweat and others. As mentioned earlier, these bodily products are closely related to the sense of smell, which is likely to play a role in the overall disgust arousal, especially because of its presence immediately before the people were discovered (the vividly described unholy stench). However, the number and unknown identity of the individuals may also play a role. Kolnai offers a comparable example when he asks:

> [H]ow many persons are seized by a modicum of disgust when they are penned together with others in a tram or bus […]? There exists indeed a quite normal propensity towards bodily disgust, which exerts itself, admittedly only in specific circumstances, such as, for example, where the body obtrudes upon us simply as such, when it makes itself felt too much as a body, so that it is devoid of that 'human' role which makes it acceptable.[96]

Although Kolnai uses a real-life example with a tram or a bus, the fact that the people discovered by the characters are complete strangers located in a dark basement could lead to a similar feeling of disgust with the human bodies themselves being the main source. It should also be noted that the quantity of people could play a crucial role. Although it is not further specified in the example, it can be inferred from phrases such as "all trying to hide" and "one by one"[97] that there is indeed a large number of people. This may be similar to the example given by Kolnai and could easily begin to arouse disgust on its own. However, another significant point regarding the source of disgust is that all the people, male and female, are completely naked. Danae Ioannou claims that "[t]he body coexists with the dress, both changing form and meaning through the process of wearing. Changing the form or the anatomy of the

[95] Kolnai, *On Disgust*, 61.
[96] Kolnai, *On Disgust*, 61.
[97] McCarthy, *The Road*, 93.

body can be the source of disgust."[98] Therefore, even the absence of dress can be connected with particular changes in meaning, possibly inducing disgust in the subject. In combination with Kolnai's observations above, it can be said that bodily disgust can also arise when bodies are obtrusive and make themselves perceived too much as bodies. In this regard, it could be said that this sudden and unwelcome intimacy caused by nudity can intensify the feeling of disgust even more.

Moreover, before the disgust stops being experienced as such and presumably transforms into the sublate, other elements appear to intensify it. First, as the characters come down the stairs and become aware of the potentially disgust-inducing presence of the prisoners in the basement, the sensory perception of smell is mentioned again. As Korsmeyer emphasizes, "disgust virtually requires sensory input, especially from the bodily senses of smell, touch, or taste […]. Foul objects stink and nauseate; they are slithery, gooey, sticky, and oozing. These sensory properties signify the processes that produce them, as disgusting things fester and rot."[99] Therefore, the repeated appearance of the smell, described the second time as hideous, may be an important factor in arousing the reader's disgust. Moreover, its repeated mention is likely to remind the reader that the smell may be caused by decomposition and other processes related to putrefaction. In this case, the characters also notice a dirty mattress and a "man with his legs gone to the hip and the stumps of them blackened and burnt."[100] This deformity may be another sensory input that, along with the recurring descriptions of smell, is likely to induce disgust and function as its main component. At this point, it is crucial to mention that the reader is likely to experience not only disgust but also some degree of fear during this encounter with the deformed, barely alive man. According to Kolnai, "[t]he allusion to the death of the total organism clearly calls forth in the first place more horror than disgust; yet the more concrete and vivid the horror, the more it inclines towards disgust."[101] Thus, while the disfigured man is likely to raise questions in the reader's mind about what happened to him and how he could be alive in such conditions, his presence also alludes to imminent death and danger, which is likely to evoke horror.

Furthermore, since the horrifying descriptions of his stump, the bloody mattress, the other naked people, and the dark cellar can be considered very vivid and concrete, the reader's experience is likely to be on the borderline between disgust and horror. Furthermore, in his

[98] Danae Ioannou, "Negative Aesthetics, Grotesque Bodies and Disgusting Fashion in the 21st Century," *ZoneModa Journal* 13, no. 1S (October 2023): 67.
[99] Korsmeyer, *Savoring Disgust*, 30–31.
[100] McCarthy, *The Road*, 93.
[101] Kolnai, *On Disgust*, 62.

study, Kolnai lists deformity as one of the possible sources of disgust, explaining that "[i]n the case of cripples it is not the functional inadequacy which has a disgusting effect—the latter never arises, for example, in cases of deafness, nor of limping—but the deformation of shape, […] such as a bloody stump."[102] Thus, the obvious fact that the man lying on the mattress has lost his legs up to the hips and that his body is no longer fully functional is not the primary source of disgust. Rather, it is the deformity and a certain deviation from the standard appearance of the human body itself. Danae Ioannou observes that "[h]uman beings are socially trained to feel repelled by anything that seems "abnormal" — disgust has an evolutionary role in protecting health (distaste/core disgust), […] so when the body is presented as disfigured, the first emotional response to this image is negative."[103] Therefore, this scene, along with the vivid description of the stumps that appear to be burned and blackened, will likely evoke a very strong and negative feeling of disgust in the reader. At this point, however, it is also likely to begin to transform into an emotion other than disgust.

When all the aforementioned elements and effects are combined, disgust may no longer be experienced as such. According to Kolnai, "everything disgusting, conceived purely intentionally, somehow 'adheres' to the subject, embraces it with its proximity, with its miasma, (though not necessarily, as it were, catching it in a net from which there is no escape)."[104] Thus, while experiencing the climax of disgust, the potentially fully immersed readers are likely to feel in the grip of something beyond the possibility of understanding, from which they cannot escape. Sara Heinämaa explains that disgust "alternates between repulsion and attraction and is able to combine instantaneous, even violent rejection with persisting fascination. […] [D]isgust-elicitors command us to eject, expel and distance, but concurrently they captivate our interest and order us fix [*sic*] our gaze upon them."[105] Hence, the feeling of disgust may begin to turn into powerlessness, reaching so deep that it is likely to astonish the reader and initiate an intense aesthetic experience of the sublate. Before the characters in the example run back up the stairs and the naked people in the foul, dark basement beg them for help, the reader has a few moments to ponder the disgusting object. As Korsmeyer observes, "[t]he counterpart to the sublime glimpse of cosmic power is the sublate confrontation with the vulnerability of material nature. Complementary aesthetic modes, one is exalted, uplifting, and spiritual; the other intimate and physical, recognizing the lowest common denominator of organic beings."[106]

[102] Kolnai, *On Disgust*, 62.
[103] Ioannou, "Negative Aesthetics," 67. Punctuation original.
[104] Kolnai, *On Disgust*, 55. Punctuation original.
[105] Heinämaa, "Disgust," 385.
[106] Korsmeyer, *Savoring Disgust*, 158.

Therefore, during this aesthetic experience that follows from disgust, the reader is likely to be confronted with the fragility of their material existence. This may further intensify their feeling of powerlessness and tighten the grip of the immense power that takes control of their minds. Kolnai confirms this when he writes that disgust signifies "the directedness towards death of our life itself, of our existence as made up of material which is consecrated to death; one could also say that we are drowned within a material which is already prepared for decay."[107] Thus, as noted earlier, the reader's experience could initially be identified as one of pure disgust, likely to be triggered primarily by the descriptions of odors, the naked human bodies that feel too much like bodies, and the deformed body of the disfigured man with burnt stumps. Nevertheless, the aesthetic experience of disgust can change its mode and trigger another very intense experience that could be identified as the sublate.

As mentioned above, in the experience of the sublate, the readers are likely to realize that the individual disgust-inducing objects are very much like themselves. Thus, disgust may no longer be experienced as a somatic spasm and the feeling of aversion, but rather as an intense introspective reflection of one's mortality and the fragility of one's material existence. The reader is likely to feel powerless and under the control of an incomprehensible power that is directing their own body toward the inevitable death, as if trapped in an envelope prepared for eventual decomposition.

Moreover, this possible encounter with the sublate unconceivable feeling of insignificance and powerlessness that arouses from disgust-inducing objects is largely of similar intensity as the sublime experience. As Philip Shaw suggests, "whenever experience slips out of conventional understanding, whenever the power of an object or event is such that words fail and points of comparison disappear, then we resort to the feeling of the sublime."[108] Thus, this example may illustrate the thin line between the sublime and its aesthetic counterpart initiated by the feeling of disgust. While the former generally arises from terrifying objects, the latter is caused by events and entities associated with disgust. Nevertheless, as the examples analyzed so far seem to demonstrate, the emotions underlying these aesthetic modes are transformed into a comparable feeling of incomprehension that seems to reach beyond the ability of human understanding. It should also be noted that while the resulting effect of the sublime can generally be described as immeasurable cosmic power that changes into awe, its sublate counterpart tends to force the reader to ponder their material existence. Nevertheless,

[107] Kolnai, *On Disgust*, 78.
[108] Shaw, *The Sublime*, 2.

this aesthetic experience of the sublate is short-lived and disappears as the characters distance themselves from the source of disgust. Korsmeyer explains that

> [u]nlike the sublime, the sublate can come in small and subtle doses—little indignities, wry insights, furtive curiosities, comic interruptions. We need not always yank at the veil of Isis, descend into *jouissance*, or contemplate nonmeaning as such in order to register the somatic spasm of aesthetic disgust. The worm in the rose can appear in modest guise, prompting only a slight intake of breath, a squirm, a hesitation, a queasy little—oh.[109]

Therefore, while the sublime experience is typically longer and requires more contemplation of the object, the aesthetic disgust of the sublate can come in smaller doses. Additionally, while sublimity is often associated with grand, extraordinary objects, the sublate is quite the opposite and generally arises when the subject encounters disgusting objects that initiate the contemplation of the most rudimentary feature of a living being – the body. In this sense, the sublate, as the aesthetic counterpart of the sublime, may represent a shift from the extraordinary to the everyday, and from intellectual discourse to the masses.

Before proceeding to the next example of the sublate in McCarthy's *The Road*, it should be noted that the characters' encounter with the prisoners in the cellar is not left unexplained. As the characters hastily leave the basement and escape from the house, the man notices four men and two women approaching. Thinking they have been seen, the main characters flee into the woods and hide near the house, afraid of being caught in their escape. During the long, sleepless night, the characters hear "hideous shrieks" coming from the house and finally decide to set out through the dark forest. Later in the story, the boy asks his father: "They're going to kill those people, aren't they? Yes. Why do they have to do that? I don't know. Are they going to eat them? I don't know. They're going to eat them, aren't they? Yes. And we couldn't help them because then they'd eat us too. Yes."[110] Thus, the characters are here indicating that the people in the basement are probably the victims of cannibals. At this point, the readers may feel the spasm of disgust again, realizing that the naked people in the cellar are indeed being stored and preserved as food. Moreover, the man's blackened stumps may be evidence of the cannibals' attempt to preserve the intended food as long as possible and consume it gradually. This realization, and the possible arousal of disgust that follows, is likely to border on the sublate as the readers reconsider the entire event. Furthermore, the primary sources of disgust may consequently change from smell, naked bodies, and deformation to the phenomena of disgusting food, which will be discussed in due course.

[109] Korsmeyer, *Savoring Disgust*, 135. Emphasis original.
[110] McCarthy, *The Road*, 107.

At this juncture, it is crucial to compare how the sublime experience arising from disgust is realized in the cinematic medium as opposed to literary works. However, before analyzing possible aesthetic experiences conveyed by cinematic material, the question of how reader-response theory can be applied to film rather than literature should be answered. Subsequently, the related concept of the cinematic sublime will be explored as one of the modern forms of this aesthetic category.

As described in the first chapter of this paper, any meaning exists solely in the mind of the recipient. Although reader-response theory traditionally focuses on the relationship between the text and the reader, as Carole Berger asserts, it can also be applied to films.[111] The differences between the media are obvious; literature, perhaps more than cinema, relies on the imagination of the subject, while films may seem more expressive because of the visual content they present. Nevertheless, the processes of creating the meaning in the minds of the recipients are very similar, regardless of the medium. The viewer first engages with the content and then makes some sense of it; again, it is his or her mind that creates the meaning. In literature, the author uses expressions and devices that can be more consistent in creating the meaning, which can lead individual readers to similar responses. In cinema, however, this subjectivity becomes especially important and can lead to more discrepancies in the viewer's responses and possible aesthetic experiences arising from the work. In contrast to the relative precision of words in literature, cinema uses lighting, camera work, sound, and other cinematic devices that are interpreted differently by different viewers. Consequently, where one may find a cinematic element frightening or sublime, another may find it absurd. Thus, the reader-response theory seems to be valid for the analysis of cinematic material and could easily be transformed into the viewer-response theory. As the famous director Alain Resnais once said, "[t]he only character is the spectator."[112] Hence, subjectivity is crucial in the interpretation of literature and no less so in the interpretation of cinematic material, despite the differences in media format.

While watching a film, audiences are able to experience a plethora of different emotions, including the feeling of the sublime and other intense aesthetic experiences. As Nathan Carroll argues in *The Cinematic Sublime: Negative Pleasures, Structuring Absences*, cinema in general has embraced the category of the sublime, and currently, "[f]ilm industries (and/or filmmakers) create spectacles, meant to be passively consumed in elaborate structures with giant screens,

[111] Carole Berger, "Viewing as Action: Film and Reader Response Criticism," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (1978): 144–151, http://www.jstor.org/stable/43795669.
[112] Berger, "Viewing as Action," 144.

maximizing effects of sublimity."[113] Thus, it is evident that the sublime is present in modern cinematic media and that different filmmakers work with this category and adapt it in different ways to impact the audience. At first, it may seem that the aesthetic category of the sublime is too intricate to appear in popular Hollywood films, but as Carroll points out, it can occur not only in "art-house or avant-garde films," but also in mainstream cinema.[114] Thus, the concept of the cinematic sublime may indicate an important shift in media and also a shift from the sublime as an elite discourse (as described in the first chapter with references to John Dennis and other upper-class intellectuals embarking on Grand Tours) toward the masses and mainstream culture, such as Hollywood cinema. Moreover, this observation makes it possible to study the sublime in a wide range of material, including modern films and television series. The aesthetic experience of the sublime does not have to be initiated by content created specifically for that purpose; it can emerge from any work of art, provided the audience experiences it (note again the parallel with the reader-response theory). Lastly, the cinematic sublime, as defined by Carroll, draws on a variety of concepts ranging from the "pre-filmic" to the modern, and explores their use in cinema.[115] It then becomes apparent that even "pre-filmic" concepts, such as the Burkean natural sublime, can appear in the products of cinema. Consequently, this allows for a close analysis of contemporary films and television series in the context of both traditional and modern forms of the sublime, and to observe how traditional concepts have been transmogrified.[116]

As will soon be shown, one of the modern films that operates with the aesthetic experience of disgust is David Cronenberg's *The Fly* (1986). In this film, the young scientist Seth Brundle is interested in using telepods to teleport people from a distance. While testing his latest invention, a fly enters the telepod with him, and the DNA of both participants mixes during the teleportation process. At first Brundle is unaware of this, but at this point the slow process of his transformation into a fly begins, first indicated by the growth of strange hairs on his back.[117] When the first, initially positive, symptoms appear, he believes that the teleportation has given him extraordinary powers (note that *The Fly* could also be discussed in terms of the danger and wonder of technological progress that is productive of the digital or technological sublime). His girlfriend remains skeptical and notices that his behavior changes, his appearance

[113] Nathan Carroll, ed., *The Cinematic Sublime: Negative Pleasures, Structuring Absences* (Bristol and Chicago: Intellect Ltd., 2020), "Introduction," para. 7.
[114] Carroll, *The Cinematic Sublime*, "Introduction," para. 12.
[115] Carroll, *The Cinematic Sublime*, "Introduction," para. 12.
[116] The previous two paragraphs were drafted in Fousek, "'The Sublime' in David Lynch's Work," 19–20.
[117] David Cronenberg, dir., *The Fly* (20th Century Fox, 1986; Shout Factory, 2019), Blu-ray, 0:00:00–0:39:12.

deteriorates, and after an argument they do not see each other for a few days.[118] In the next scene, Brundle looks at himself in the mirror and notices that the strange hair is also growing on his face. Unable to shave them because of their unusual thickness, he starts nervously biting his nails. This culminates in the first potentially very intense and disgusting scene. As Brundle bites his fingernail, it begins to come off and remains in his mouth. Shocked, Brundle throws it in the sink, puts a towel on his finger, and squeezes it, splashing a white liquid all over the mirror. He then inspects his other fingers, and as the camera zooms in on his hand, he grabs his fingernail and slowly pulls it off.[119] This scene, because of its very graphic depiction of a potentially disgusting event, is likely to evoke a strong feeling of disgust in the viewer. To compare this with the aesthetic experience of disgust that comes from a written medium, it is crucial to note that films generally do not rely on verbal descriptions of events. Bonaventure Munganga asserts that "[f]ilms become […] more visually specific than novels, and film-makers prefer visual to verbal representation," noting that "films seem not need to describe as by nature they show a cornucopia of visual details."[120] Thus, while the literary medium would have to use language to describe the event, films have the ability to depict the event visually, which is likely to intensify the viewer's feeling of disgust as opposed to reading a description of the disgusting event. In this sense, it can be seen that the nature of the medium influences the aesthetic experiences that result from it, which corresponds to McLuhan's revolutionary statement discussed in the first chapter.

Furthermore, this scene is one of the first to allow the viewer to observe Brundle's gradual deterioration and transformation. Since the strange hair can already be identified as something non-human, this also makes Brundle less human and evokes the category of the grotesque. Wolfgang Kayser notes that in the grotesque, human bodies are reduced to marionettes or puppets, and their features are frozen into masks that feel too human to be considered dead or inhuman, so that the natural and familiar is suddenly transformed into the ominous and strange.[121] Hence, in the grotesque, the human body, as a very ordinary and everyday object, is used in a strange and extraordinary way, which could lead the subject into a state of terror or uncertainty, possibly facilitating the emergence of an intense aesthetic experience (note also the presence of many grotesque bodies in Lynch's work, e.g. *The Elephant Man*). In addition, the

[118] Cronenberg*, The Fly*, 0:40:00–0:57:19.
[119] Cronenberg, *The Fly*, 0:57:30–0:59:10.
[120] Bonaventure Muzigirwa Munganga, "Inference and Narrative Processing in Fiction and Film: (Where) (Does) Narrative Reading Part(s) Ways with Its Viewing and Vice Versa (?)," *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 3, no. 1 (November 2016): 4.
[121] Kayser, *The Grotesque,* 183–185.

grotesque's depiction of the human body in extraordinary and unexpected ways could also be a sign of the shift from the extraordinary to the everyday that is explored primarily in the third chapter. Moreover, as Cruickshank so aptly observes, in the grotesque, "[t]he old word is killed, eaten, incorporated into the human body, and then defecated onto the ground as fertiliser from which new life grows."[122] Therefore, when the grotesque operates with familiar objects and transforms them in unexpected and often degrading ways, it can also allow the subject to feel in the grip of a strange and astonishingly negative aesthetic experience.

This deformity and Brundle's human and at the same time non-human appearance are further emphasized when his girlfriend visits him a few days after their argument. In the following scenes, the viewer is presented with a figure that only vaguely resembles Brundle, as his face is deformed and ulcerated, he has a hunchback, and he walks with the help of two walking sticks. Although his face and general appearance are likely to be a source of disgust in themselves, the climax of the scene comes when Brundle touches his ear and it suddenly falls off, or when he shows his girlfriend how he is now forced to eat like a fly, spewing white enzyme-filled saliva that dissolves the food.[123] While the sources of disgust associated with bodily fluids and deformed appearance seem obvious, there is probably also a certain fascination that draws the audience in and keeps them watching. This is reminiscent of Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection discussed in the first chapter. According to Cruickshank, some examples of the abject include blood, spit, excrement, or corpses, which are "all things out of place, threatening the integrity of the body by allowing our insides to leak out, foreign objects to penetrate within, categories to blur, narratives to fail, and finally for our world, and the body itself, to be lost to us."[124] Therefore, as in the case of the sublime and the sublate, the fascination with the abject also becomes contrary to reason and is likely to result in incomprehensible aesthetic experiences that hover on the border between disgust and fascination. Sara Heinämaa asserts that "[w]e turn away from and take distance from the abject, but at the same time it draws and attracts us; we rebuff it, but we also feel an alluring force that resides in it."[125] Thus, when a subject encounters the abject, they recognize the need to distance themselves from it, but still feel the effect of a certain fascinating force drawing them closer. As the audience observes the half-transformed Brundle, who still resembles and behaves like a human (in contrast to later scenes when he begins to climb walls as a fly), his body is likely to be perceived

[122] Cruickshank, *The Grotesque*, 7.
[123] Cronenberg, *The Fly*, 1:02:30–1:06:02.
[124] Cruickshank, *The Grotesque*, 9.
[125] Heinämaa "Disgust," 383.

as the abject; disgusting, but at the same time fascinating. In this context, the ambivalent aesthetic experiences of disgust in *The Fly* can be perceived as the previously described category of the sublate, but this time arising from the abject and the grotesque. Just as the sublime is not experienced as fear, the sublate may not be experienced as disgust in this case, but rather as an amalgam of fascination and revulsion.

Disgust and the sublate can also arise from phenomena related to food. Near the third quarter of *The Road*, the boy and the man have again used up almost all the supplies they found earlier, and the man suddenly feels that they are being followed. The characters decide to hide on a hill near the road and wait to see who the pursuers are and how many there are. At dusk, when the man is almost asleep, he notices a figure at the top of the road, soon joined by three others. As they approach, the man is able to determine that the group consists of three men and a pregnant woman, all of whom look "wretchedlooking [*sic*] beyond description." At first, the man fears that the group will camp somewhere near them, but eventually, they continue down the road and disappear into the darkness.[126] The next day, the boy and the man set out on the road again. They do not get far before the boy notices smoke rising from the forest ahead. After a while, the man decides that they should know who these people are. The man and the boy slowly approach, thinking it is a trap, and eventually decide that the group probably had a lookout who saw the man's gun and ran away. Then, as the characters move towards the fire, they smell something:

> They left their food cooking.
> Yes.
> Let's take a look.
> It's really scary, Papa.
> There's no one here. It's okay.
>
> They walked into the little clearing, the boy clutching his hand. They'd taken everything with them except whatever black thing was skewered over the coals. He was standing there checking the perimeter when the boy turned and buried his face against him. He looked quickly to see what had happened. What is it? he said. What is it? The boy shook his head. Oh Papa, he said. He turned and looked again. What the boy had seen was a charred human infant headless and gutted and blackening on the spit. He bent and picked the boy up and started for the road with him, holding him close. I'm sorry, he whispered. I'm sorry. He didn't know if he'd ever speak again.[127]

In this example, it is first essential to explore the transformation from an obscure object to an intensely disgusting one. As the characters approach the fire, the bodily sense of smell is again the first main element that constitutes the aesthetic experience. At first, the smell is described

[126] McCarthy, *The Road*, 164.
[127] McCarthy, *The Road*, 167.

as pleasant or even appetizing, and is attributed to some food that the group left cooking during their escape. However, even though the characters have not eaten in days, there seems to be something repulsive and ominous about the smell, and consequently, the reader's apprehension is likely to arise. Kolnai observes that similar occurrences may pertain to the question of "the smell of fresh food or some other accentuated smell characteristic of food outside mealtimes, but which may clearly have a disturbing, even some kind of disgusting effect—as of course, may everything in this sensory sphere which intrudes upon us at the wrong time."[128] Thus, although the smell is initially described as appetizing, the source of the smell is initially unknown to the reader and comes at a very unexpected time, which may force the reader to distrust its origin and feel disturbed. Moreover, the reader's apprehension and uncertainty about the appetizing odor is likely to culminate as the full extent of its source is gradually revealed.

First, the characters move closer to the fire, and the source of the smell is no longer described as food but as a burnt thing hanging over the coals. Then, the reader may observe that the boy also senses something ominous about the smell, and his discovery is likely to suddenly change the entire viewpoint. As the man inspects the blackened thing, the reader may abruptly realize that the smell does not come from food but something else entirely. As a result, the originally appetizing object is likely to evoke a surge of disgust so sudden that its intensity can border on the sublate. Furthermore, the vivid descriptions of the source of disgust further reinforce this binary opposition between appetizing and disgusting. As Kolnai observes, "[f]oods are not things that simply come our way; they are functionally integrated into our lives as material that we are to consume."[129] Not only is the source of disgust a deceased human being, but it has been disemboweled, decapitated, and deliberately prepared as food for consumption, which is likely to strengthen the reader's feeling of disgust.

Besides, it should be noted that the source of the aesthetic experience is not disgusting in itself. On the contrary, an infant could be generally regarded as a symbol of life, and its transformation into a source of disgust occurs through its deliberate preparation as a material to be consumed. Furthermore, Korsmeyer observes that in some cases, disgust arises only when a particular food should actually be consumed.[130] Therefore, while the infant may not be considered disgusting as a being, it becomes disgusting when it is described as food or a blackened thing that is to be consumed. Additionally, the source of disgust may not be the infant's eviscerated body itself, but rather the act of cooking and consuming it, which may help

[128] Kolnai, *On Disgust*, 60. Punctuation original.
[129] Kolnai, *On Disgust*, 59.
[130] Korsmeyer, *Savoring Disgust*, 64.

the potential sublate experience reach its climax. Kolnai adds that such an example "involves partly a reference towards those elements of disgust which relate to the preservation of life and of its functioning, partly to the more abstract, formal and in this sense 'moral' disgust aroused by satiety."[131] Thus, while this non-food is being prepared to preserve the life of a group suffering from starvation in a post-apocalyptic world, it may still bear moral implications and explain why the group left in such a hurry. Consequently, it can be observed that the source of disgust and possible sublate experience comes not only from the material aspect, but also from the moral.

Furthermore, as a universal symbol of life, the infant in this case represents both life and death. Although in a morally disgusting way, its body is still intended to help preserve life, thus questionably fulfilling its symbolic role in the story. In addition, Kolnai explains that "the challenge which is to be found in disgust shows itself substantially in the fact that the object signifies to the subject at one and the same time both life and death (the latter in the irrevocable, overwhelming sense) and draws both tightly towards it."[132] Thus, while disgust is generally associated with both life and death, the latter is likely to overwhelm the readers' senses and force them to contemplate their material existence, possibly leading to the experience of the sublate disgust. Moreover, in Korsmeyer's analysis of a comparable example in which a woman eats her lover's heart, she notes that

> [t]here may be a moment of nausea when we read how she eats the heart, but the somatic spasm runs far deeper than a simple food rejection. […] Instead, her [the wife's] initial silence is a signal that what she experiences is so beyond ordinary emotion as to be utterly inexpressible. […] [D]isgust is an indispensable element of the aesthetic apprehension of this story, for as an intimate, physical response it delivers an aesthetic, somatic insight that no other emotion can ground. The sublate surpasses revulsion. It is a recognition that begins with a somatic spasm that prompts compressed or distilled recognition of cruelty, mortality, horror, [and] hate […].[133]

Therefore, while disgust may be considered a common revulsive sensory reaction, its aesthetic experience in the form of the sublate goes far beyond this. Instead, it functions as the basis for an inexpressible aesthetic insight into the insignificance and temporariness of material existence based on other individual emotions and aspects associated with the disgusting object. In its final effect, the sublate may no longer be experienced as disgust but rather as an intense feeling beyond human comprehension, not dissimilar to the experience of the sublime.

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[131] Kolnai, *On Disgust*, 59.
[132] Kolnai, *On Disgust*, 77.
[133] Korsmeyer, "Fear and Disgust," 377–378.

Before concluding this chapter, it is worth noting that *The Road*, as a post-apocalyptic novel, could also operate with the terror and possible sublime experience that results from various disasters that may lead to an apocalypse. In particular, since the apocalypse in the novel is likely to be caused by climate change, it could evoke a sense of the environmental sublime (note the parallel with the concept of solastalgia). For instance, Ian Buchanan aptly observes that "now, if anything, nature stands in need of rescuing," and compares nature to "a God that needs our help to survive, instead of the other way around."[134] In this sense, it can be seen that nature may not be the primary source of the sublime today, but rather it may arise from global, overwhelming events such as war, disaster, and climate change,[135] which could be a point of future research.

In conclusion, this chapter established that the sublime experience arising from disgust, specifically the sublate, can potentially arise from modern works of art such as *The Road* or *The Fly*. The chapter then drew a parallel between aesthetic experiences and the elements of distance, immersion, and indeterminacy of the text as factors that can facilitate the emergence of the sublime or sublate experience. Furthermore, the analysis of *The Road* has shown that in the experience of the sublate, disgust can cease to be experienced as such and can possibly transcend into a sense of smallness and insignificance arising from the insight into the mortal nature of human beings. Lastly, the analysis of selected scenes from *The Fly* has drawn attention to the idea that disgust and the sublate often arise from grotesque bodies, and that the cinematic material and its graphic depictions of disgusting events are likely to evoke a stronger sense of disgust than the written medium, meaning that the nature of the medium has the potential to influence the aesthetic experience it conveys.

[134] Ian Buchanan, *Fredric Jameson: Live Theory* (London and New York: Continuum, 2006), 98.
[135] See, for example, David E. Nye, *Seven Sublimes* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2022).

3. TECHNOLOGICAL AND DIGITAL SUBLIME

As shown in the previous chapters, modern forms of the sublime often operate with different sources than traditional concepts, including objects of technology. The main part of this chapter focuses on a detailed analysis of how the technological and digital sublime operates in cinematic material, specifically in the episode "Nosedive" (2016) of the British television series *Black Mirror* (2011–2025). The chapter then explores cinematic techniques and aspects specific to the cinematic medium that facilitate the emergence of the sublime experience. Furthermore, it focuses on the shift from the extraordinary to the everyday and from elite discourse to mass culture. In the final section, the chapter analyzes selected passages from Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1986) and observes how the experience of the sublime is realized in the written medium as opposed to cinematic material.

At this juncture, it is essential to introduce the television series *Black Mirror*, which often operates with intense aesthetic experiences that are likely to border on the sublime. As an anthology, each episode presents a different story and a different set of characters. However, most episodes are set in the near future and explore dystopian worlds with various sci-fi technology. As the following analysis will attempt to show, some of the modern forms of the sublime, such as the digital or technological sublime, can be identified in *Black Mirror*, where it often takes the form of an overwhelming force resulting from the unknown scale of technological progress and the dangers associated with it.

In "Nosedive," the first episode of the third season of *Black Mirror*, the viewer is initially presented with a familiar world that soon unexpectedly becomes completely unfamiliar and strange due to the level of technological advancement presented. When the viewer first sees the main character, Lacie Pound, using a social media application on her smartphone, everything seems familiar and similar to the real world. However, when Lacie leaves the house for an appointment, the viewer may realize that social media has already reached another level of advancement in this dystopian world. Not only Lacie, but all the people she meets have phones in their hands at all times, and as the viewer is likely to soon discover, the social media platform is based on a rating system that takes into account the user's shared online posts as well as real-time interactions with other people.[136] Through a bionic eye implant, users can see other people's names and ratings and search for information on their social media page. The system is based on ratings from one to five stars, based on which the person's overall rating is

[136] Charlie Brooker, creator, *Black Mirror* (House of Tomorrow, 2016), Netflix, S03E01, 0:00:00–0:06:06.

calculated. This rating system in the form of a technology that influences and controls human behavior is the first crucial stimulus that can induce terror in the viewer.

The degree of control this technology has over people is further illustrated in a scene in which Lacie arrives at work. After Lacie sits down at her desk and checks how her new social media post is being rated by other people, she is interrupted by Chester, an office assistant, who offers her a smoothie. As the camera cuts to Lacie's point of view, the viewer can see that Chester's rating is only 3.1, while Lacie's is 4.2. When Lacie politely takes Chester's smoothie and gives him a good rating, other people in the office frown at her. As her coworker soon explains, the office team isn't talking to Chester because he ended his relationship with his significant other, and tells Lacie that "if it drops below 2.5, then it's bye-bye." Lacie then looks at her smartphone and notices that several anonymous people have already rated her poorly, most likely as an immediate reaction to her positive encounter with Chester.[137] From this and later events in the story, the viewer is likely to infer that the rating system can affect people's socio-economic status, and when it reaches a certain threshold, it has consequences. Thus, the viewer might realize that society in this dystopian world has reached a stage where technology is more powerful than humans and controls people's actions and future possibilities. In this case from "Nosedive," technology is not presented as being in absolute control of the world, but rather as a force that holds people captive and limits their choices. Members of this dystopian society still have free will and can rate other people positively or negatively based on their own considerations, but the existence of such advanced technology in the form of a ubiquitous social media platform controls their social and economic status. In other words, they cannot escape the omnipresence of technology and ultimately must always conform.

Such overwhelming effects of technology can be discussed in terms of the technological or digital sublime. As Emily Brady notes, "our own culture and technology become the source of awe that is at once strange and familiar. There is an anxious excitement in the presence of something so far beyond the human scale, and we exclaim, 'How is this possible?'"[138] Thus, as suggested in the first chapter, the sources of the sublime and its effects are now conveyed through new, technological objects rather than through objects of nature. Because of the unknown scale and consequences of technological progress, modern forms and aesthetic experiences of the sublime are now likely to come from genres such as science fiction, which represent both the wonder arising from technology as a product of the human intellect and the

[137] Brooker, *Black Mirror*, S03E01, 0:06:10–0:08:23.
[138] Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, 144.

dangers and fears associated with it. Furthermore, Ian Buchanan observes that in postmodernism,

> nature no longer commands the same metaphysical attention it used to. […] Nature is no longer our other, our sublime. What has replaced it is technology, although not technology in and of itself (just as it was never a matter of nature in and of itself), but rather what technology stands for.[139]

Thus, in modern forms of the aesthetic category of the sublime, the natural has been replaced by the technological. Moreover, the transcendental experiences that encounters with nature or technology can evoke are not based on the sources themselves, but rather on what they represent. As discussed earlier, such metaphysical qualities in relation to nature may derive from its grandeur and terror as a force beyond human control. In relation to technology, however, the transcendental experience is based on the results and alluring power of the human intellect combined with the terror and unfathomability of its magnitude and the possible results of technology dominating its inventors.

Furthermore, it is crucial to note that in contrast to the technological sublime, the aesthetic category of the digital sublime also focuses on a shift in media and capacities to represent new, unknown worlds, rather than a mere shift in the objects used to convey the sublime. Nikita Mathias observes that the digital offers new ways to manipulate cinematic material in an unparalleled degree and that "[d]igital technologies, such as CGI (Computer Generated Imagery), DI (Digital Intermediate), digital animation, motion capturing, digital compositing, virtual camera, and blue and greenscreen technologies, essentially contribute now to a film's final appeal."[140] Thus, the modern digital and technological forms of the sublime are conveyed through new sources such as the power of technology or cyberspace, but also through new digital media and hypermedia that allow for new possibilities of representation. In this context, the aesthetic categories of the digital and technological sublime, as conveyed through digital cinematic material, can function both as the visual presentation of the sublime objects and as the medium that allows the emergence of the viewer's sublime experience.

The ways in which the technological and digital sublime are conveyed through cinematic material can be seen in another scene from the episode "Nosedive." As Lacie tries to look for a new place to live after her landlord finds new tenants, she attends an appointment with a real estate agent in one of the newest housing developments. During the appointment, the agent shows her the house and uses a digital holographic image, sampled from Lacie's photos on the

[139] Buchanan, *Fredric Jameson: Live Theory*, 98.
[140] Mathias, *Disaster Cinema*, 160.

social media platform, to show how Lacie might spend her morning in the kitchen, including a holographic image of a potential partner living there with her.[141] Watching this scene, the viewer is likely to further understand the dominant position that technology plays in this dystopian world, influencing people's decisions through fully personalized advertising. At the prospect of a happy life in the house, Lacie expresses serious interest in buying it, but after discussing the financial terms, she learns that she would not be able to afford it at the moment. Then, the real estate agent tells her that there are options and mentions a "Prime Influencers Program." However, Lacie would only qualify for this program if her rating was around 4.5, which would then give her a 20% discount, so she would still need to improve her current rating. As Lacie leaves and walks home, she looks at a nearby billboard. The camera cuts away and the viewer is presented with a scene of the billboard which depicts Lacie and her partner from the digital holographic image enjoying a meal together. As Lacie turns away, the viewer can see that her image disappears from the billboard, leaving only an empty outline of a person waiting to be filled and personalized as another individual walks by.[142] In the described sequence from the episode "Nosedive," the viewer may not feel terror or other negative emotions at first, but this is likely to change abruptly when the scene with the holographic images is presented. This is where the power and extent of technological advancement in the fictional world is shown, and the viewer may feel the first signs of terror at this encounter.

It is crucial to note that personalized advertising based on data collection is a well-known strategy in the contemporary world, but "Nosedive" allows the viewer to see to what new and terrifying stage it may evolve in the future. As Buchanan asserts, the sublime power of technology lies in the fact that it provides visible signs of a network of control and power that the human mind is virtually incapable of comprehending, and, as he continues, "[c]inema is undoubtedly the medium that has best been able to grasp this potential of the new machines."[143] Therefore, when the audience watches the scene with the fully personalized billboard that changes its appearance depending on who is looking at it, it is possible that an intense aesthetic experience will emerge. Katharina Loew notes that the technological sublime arises from "objects that exceed our sensory capacities and result in conflicting emotions of pleasure and pain" and that films can "evoke the overpowering sensory impressions and concomitant emotions of terror and wonder that characterize the sublime."[144] Thus, as the example from the

[141] Brooker, *Black Mirror*, S03E01, 0:08:26–0:09:35.
[142] Brooker, *Black Mirror*, S03E01, 0:09:40–0:10:34.
[143] Buchanan, *Fredric Jameson*: *Live Theory*, 99.
[144] Katharina Loew, *Special Effects and German Silent Film* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021), 186.

episode "Nosedive" illustrates, cinematic material has the capacity to present the viewer with the immense power of technology that transcends human capacities for understanding and can potentially result in an ambivalent amalgam of astonishment and terror. However, it is crucial to focus on what specifically enables cinematic material to evoke such intense aesthetic experiences. In her analysis of a different cinematic work, Loew points out that

> [s]pecial effects visualize technology's coinciding horror and fascination and thus evoke sublime experiences. By so doing, they render the unfathomability of technology itself and transform the film's central concern, the impending obliteration of humanity as a consequence of total machination, into art.[145]

In "Nosedive," the level of technological progress is not as advanced. Although there is no direct danger to humanity, the viewer is still likely to notice that technology may soon reach the stage of total machination, as it affects people's socio-economic status and influences their choices. Moreover, to draw another parallel between Loew's analysis and "Nosedive," it should be noted that special effects are one of the main components that allow the author to present the technological or digital sublime to the viewer. In the previously described scenes from "Nosedive," visual effects are first used to depict that people in the dystopian world have bionic eye implants that allow them to project other people's ratings, names, and social media sites directly onto their retinas. In addition, the importance of special effects comes into play particularly in the aforementioned scenes where Lacie visits the house she wants to buy and the real estate agent shows her a digital holographic image of herself preparing breakfast in the highly innovative kitchen, along with a holographic image of a potential partner coming down the stairs to hug her. It seems obvious that such a scene would not be possible without visual effects. In addition, when Lacie looks at the fully personalized billboard that shows her enjoying a meal with the potential partner, special effects are used to show the audience that the image on the billboard changes depending on who is looking at it. Therefore, it can be said that since the aforementioned scenes present the viewer with the dangers and immense possibilities of technological progress that are likely to border on the sublime, special effects can be identified as one of the main components that contribute to the emergence of the modern digital sublime in cinematic material.

In addition to special effects, there are several other elements that are specific to the cinematic material and its ability to evoke intense aesthetic experiences. A characteristic feature of the cinematic medium and its presentation of sublime objects and events is closely related to camera work. Nikita Mathias asserts that "[a]s for the cinematic presentation of sublime objects,

[145] Loew, *Special Effects,* 186.

the camera controls and frames the viewer's subjective encounter of these objects, whether they are viewed from a distance or in close proximity, in an act of reflexivity or affective immediacy."[146] Therefore, it could be said that different techniques in terms of camera work can have an impact on the way the viewer's aesthetic experience is shaped. For example, in cinematic material, the sublime objects can be presented as distant or close, which consequently affects the viewer's response to the object. In this context, such techniques specific to the cinematic medium evoke the previously discussed McLuhan's thesis of "the medium is the message."[147] In particular, the visual nature of the cinematic medium, special effects, camera work, its ability to immerse the viewer or depict time, and other related elements are likely to influence its content and shape the aesthetic experiences that arise from it. This further emphasizes the importance of the relationship between the type of medium and the content of the message discussed in previous chapters, suggesting that the aesthetic experience of the sublime can be influenced by the nature of the medium from which it emerges. Moreover, Mathias confirms this when he points out that

> the camera channels and draws attention toward elements inside or outside the frame. But it can also become an immediate cause for experiences of the sublime by overpowering the spectator's sensibility through (and through the combination of) swish pans, swift tracking shots, and obscuring focal length effects.[148]

Therefore, the cinematic medium not only uses camera work to direct the viewer's attention to specific objects or events that can potentially trigger the experience of the sublime, but it also functions as an element that can itself initiate such intense aesthetic responses. By combining various camera techniques, the cinematic medium has the potential to overwhelm the viewer's senses and possibly lead to the experience of the sublime. In this sense, the nature of the medium can be seen as a factor that sometimes contributes more to the emergence of aesthetic experiences than its content.

Moreover, in relation to the digital and technological sublime in cinematic material, it is crucial to focus on how the genre of science fiction relates to these aesthetic categories. It seems obvious that the episode "Nosedive" from the television series *Black Mirror* belongs to this genre, as it depicts fictional scientific progress and its possible consequences for the human race. As already mentioned, this immense scale of technological progress can evoke both astonishment and terror in the viewer, and thus is likely to produce the sublime aesthetic

[146] Mathias, *Disaster Cinema*, 158–159.
[147] McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 7.
[148] Mathias, *Disaster Cinema*, 159.

experience. First, it is important to note that the concept of the sublime is not an entirely new phenomenon in the academic discussion of science fiction, although the connection has not always been clearly articulated. As Edward James asserts, the fact that the concept of the sublime "has a close connection with the pleasures derived from reading sf has long been recognized by readers and critics, even if that word has seldom been used. The phrase that *has* been used, and which to a large extent corresponds, is 'Sense of Wonder' […]."[149] Therefore, in relation to aesthetic experiences conveyed by science fiction, critics have traditionally used the term "sense of wonder," which seems to have many parallels with the much older concept of the sublime. For example, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay observes that of all modern genres, science fiction is the most likely to convey the aesthetic experience of the sublime, and labels this category "science-fictional sublime" or "technoscientific sublime," which "entails a sense of awe and dread in response to human technological projects that exceed the power of their human creators."[150] Thus, it becomes clear that the traditionally discussed sense of wonder emerging from science fiction can be identified as one of the modern forms of the sublime, despite the varying terminology of technological, digital, technoscientific, or other sublimes. What all these forms have in common is the transformation from traditional sublime objects of nature to modern technological sources.

Additionally, the episode "Nosedive" contains precisely the elements that Csicsery-Ronay defines above as productive of the technological sublime. To be more specific, it depicts a product of technological advancement in the form of a social media platform that surpasses the power of its human inventors, potentially inducing a sense of terror and astonishment in the viewer that is likely to border on the sublime. Furthermore, Loew confirms this when she asserts that science fiction as a genre "fictionalizes the rhetoric of the technological sublime" primarily through its ubiquitous depiction of "[p]owerful technological environments and omnipotent machines that humans struggle to control."[151] Therefore, the main source of the aesthetic experience of the sublime in science fiction seems to be the point that advanced technology is an ingenious human invention, but at the same time its creators are losing control over it. In addition, it is crucial to note the obvious fact that science fiction does indeed fictionalize the concept of the technological sublime, which may be the reason why Csicsery-Ronay uses the term science-fictional sublime. Just as the traditional natural sublime can arise from the

[149] Edward James, *Science Fiction in the 20th Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 105. Emphasis original.
[150] Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr, *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction* (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2011), 6–7.
[151] Loew, *Special Effects*, 200.

subject's firsthand encounter with objects of nature as well as from their fictional representation, the technological and digital sublime are likely to operate in the same way, perhaps only varying in intensity. Loew further clarifies that in science fiction, "the sublime sentiment arises from a clash between the boundless technical ingenuity and the fundamental inadequacy and fragility of the human race."[152] Thus, the aesthetic experience of the sublime is likely to arise from the positive sense of wonder and appreciation of the capabilities of the human intellect, and subsequently from the negative fear and terror induced by technology's ability to obliterate the fragile human being. To put this in the context of "Nosedive," it has already been suggested that the viewer is likely to be astonished by the scenes showing, for example, eye implants as the result of human scientific ingenuity, but at the same time possibly terrified by the shots of fully personalized holographic images and billboards. These objects are also presented as astonishing products of human technological progress, but when combined with their terrifying features and the dangers they pose to the human race, they are capable of initiating the aesthetic experience of the sublime. Lastly, it is crucial to draw a parallel between the genre of science fiction and its realization in the cinematic medium. Loew points out that "[s]cience fiction cinema privileges technology thematically, while relying on special-effect technologies for realization" and further observes that cinema relies on special effects "to express coexisting positive *and* negative attitudes towards technological innovations."[153] Hence, as suggested earlier, special effects are a technique specific to the cinematic medium that can be used to shape the experience of the sublime. However, this observation becomes even more evident in the discussion of science fiction cinema, where visual effects are ubiquitous and become the main element likely to form the aesthetic experience of the viewer.

In relation to the discussion of media, it is crucial to note that the digital sublime often applies to the most advanced media that allow interactivity with the viewer, such as interactive films or even video games. Here, the nature of the audience changes and it is more appropriate to speak of direct participants. However, as mentioned earlier, the aesthetic experience of the sublime requires a certain distance in order to be transformed from fear. While interactivity and participation may lead to a lesser degree of psychological distance, the subject is still not directly threatened by the objects or events, and thus the sublime experience can arise even from interactive media. A case in point might be the interactive film *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* (2018) or various open-world video games such as *No Man's Sky* (2016). For

[152] Loew, *Special Effects*, 200.
[153] Loew, *Special Effects*, 201–202. Emphasis original.

example, Yaeri Kim and some other scholars[154] speak of a "virtual sublime" that "generates the sublime through interactivity, immersion, and virtuality" and is "simultaneously novel and continuous in the tradition of the sublime media."[155] Since there is a lack of academic research on this new phenomenon and its relationship to the subject, it could be a point of future research.

At this juncture, it is important to consider whether the previously discussed sources of the digital and technological sublime still utilize objects outside of everyday life or rather employ mundane objects. As Anastasios Gaitanidis and Polona Curk assert, traditional "notions of the sublime have been referring to the topic areas of extraordinary, intra-psychic and high-cultural, the notion of the sublime as something exceptional that comes from outside the experience of the everyday and unsettles it."[156] In 1704, John Dennis explained that "Enthusiastick [*sic*] Passion or Enthusiasm, is a Passion which is moved by the Idea's in Contemplation or the Meditation of Things, that belong not to common Life,"[157] and later concluded in his treatise that this passion is what allows the sublime to emerge.[158] Therefore, the traditional concepts deemed sublimity as emerging exclusively from objects associated with the extraordinary, such as "the Prospects of an open Champain Country, a vast uncultivated Desart [*sic*], of huge Heaps of Mountains, high Rocks and Precipices, or a wide Expanse of Waters,"[159] as described by Joseph Addison. As noted in the first chapter, both Dennis and Addison were among the upper-class noblemen who undertook Grand Tours of the Alps, during which they wrote some of the first accounts of the sublime experience arising from extraordinary objects of nature. Furthermore, Dennis reinforces his claim that the sublime can only arise from extraordinary objects: "For Men are moved for Two Reasons, either because they have weak Minds and Souls, that are capable of being moved by little Objects, and consequently by little and ordinary Idea's; or because they have greatness of Soul and Capacity, to discern and feel the great ones."[160] Thus, Dennis and some of his other contemporaries established the basis for the aesthetic experience of the sublime as arising only from immense objects and ideas that are out of the ordinary. Furthermore, Dennis suggests here that to be

[154] See, for example, Eugénie Shinkle, "Videogames and the Digital Sublime," in *Digital Cultures and the Politics of Emotion*, ed. Athina Karatzogianni and Adi Kuntsman (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).
Or Matthew Spokes, *Gaming and the Virtual Sublime: Rhetoric, Awe, Fear, and Death in Contemporary Video Games* (Leeds: Emerald Publishing, 2020).
[155] Yaeri Kim, "'Beyond Their Actual Limits': Immersion, Interactivity, and the Virtual Sublime in Burke and Video Games," *Games and Culture* 18, no. 1 (January 2023): 126.
[156] Anastasios Gaitanidis and Polona Curk, eds., *The Sublime in Everyday Life* (Abington and New York: Routledge, 2021), 5.
[157] Dennis, *The Grounds*, 16. Capitalization original.
[158] Dennis, *The Grounds*, 79.
[159] Addison, *The Spectator* 412.
[160] Dennis, *The Grounds*, 21.

moved by small objects and ordinary ideas is a sign of weak-mindedness, whereas to be able to appreciate and feel the power of immense, extraordinary objects requires the intellectual capacity to do so. With this assertion, Dennis may be suggesting not only that the sublime experience should generally arise exclusively from extraordinary objects, but also that ordinary ideas and small objects are only capable of initiating this aesthetic experience if the subjects have "weak Minds and Souls,"[161] thus emphasizing the perception of the traditional sublime as an elite intellectual discourse.

As mentioned in the first chapter, the concept of the sublime was first rediscovered in the 1554 Latin copy of Longinus's *On Sublimity* and its 1674 French translation by Nicolas Boileau, meaning that it was only available to a select audience that could read in either French or Latin. As might be expected, the aesthetic experience of the sublime could still have been encountered by a wider public that was completely unaware of the existence of this concept. As Philip Shaw observes, sublimity "refers to the moment when the ability to apprehend, to know, and to express a thought or sensation is defeated. Yet through this very defeat, the mind gets a feeling for that which lies beyond thought and language."[162] Therefore, the sublime, as an aesthetic experience consisting of the ambivalent emotions of terror and astonishment, can obviously be experienced even without an awareness of its conceptual framework. However, due to the possible lack of awareness of its conceptualization, such voices from the wider public have long been unable to contribute to the development or exploration of this concept. Emily Brady affirms that "[t]heories of the sublime emerged in line with these [economic, social, religious, and technological] changes, as more people – typically the elite, but also the middle classes – were in a position to appreciate sublime nature rather than simply fear it."[163] Therefore, the traditional concept of the sublime can be seen as an elite discourse that only gradually reached the masses. Taking all of this into account, it can be said that the traditional concept of the natural sublime thus generally rejected everyday objects as capable of conveying the sublime, and furthermore regarded such mundane objects and the aesthetic experience derived from them as a sign of a certain intellectual deficiency and social inferiority. However, as will soon become clear, modern forms of the sublime often employ mundane objects and are readily accessible to the masses, not merely a select elite audience.

In the episode "Nosedive" from the television series *Black Mirror*, the objects that are likely to initiate the aesthetic experience of the sublime demonstrate precisely this tendency to

[161] Dennis, *The Grounds*, 21.
[162] Shaw, *The Sublime*, 3.
[163] Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, 185.

move from the extraordinary to the mundane. First, in the previously described scenes, the viewer is presented with the main character Lacie using a social media platform on her smartphone, which could be considered part of the everyday reality of most people today. Moreover, when Lacie leaves her apartment, the viewer is likely to notice that this dystopian world is perhaps already a step forward from our reality, since every person Lacie meets is actively using their smartphone with the social media platform, and this technology is presented as ubiquitous.[164] Therefore, before the object of technology can possibly be experienced as sublime, it is presented as mundane and as an everyday part of people's lives in this dystopian society. However, this familiar, ordinary object in the form of a cell phone with a social media application can potentially be defamiliarized for the viewer. This happens in the scenes where the power of this technology is presented, and the viewer can notice that the platform is based on a rating system that affects people's socio-economic status. As discussed earlier, in Lacie's workplace, the office assistant Chester suddenly has a low rating because the office team was not on his side when he parted ways with his significant other.[165] Even though this is a very personal matter, the workplace team can express their opinion on this using the social media platform. At this point, the viewer is likely to realize that the everyday object of technology is much more powerful and terrifying. When Lacie arrives at the office the next day, Chester is standing in front of the entrance and says, "The door won't open, I'm on 2.4,"[166] meaning that his rating is too low and the social platform has been used to lower his status. This may show how even mundane objects such as smartphones and a social media application can be presented in a sublime way as objects that show the astonishing wonder and terrifying danger of technological progress. Furthermore, the previous analysis has shown that even other ordinary objects in this episode, such as the fully personalized billboard, can potentially be used to convey intense aesthetic experiences. It can be said that the objects are subjected to certain modifications through special effects and other aforementioned techniques specific to the cinematic medium, allowing them to be presented in an extraordinary way that is capable of triggering the experience of the sublime.

However, this does not diminish their mundane basis as objects commonly present in everyday life. Thomas Leddy points out that "aesthetic experience of everyday phenomena can be sublime, and that such sublime experience can be a high point in human experience."[167]

[164] Brooker, *Black Mirror*, S03E01, 0:00:00–0:03:30.
[165] Brooker, *Black Mirror*, S03E01, 0:06:10–0:08:23.
[166] Brooker, *Black Mirror*, S03E01, 0:13:45–0:14:00.
[167] Thomas Leddy, *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary. The Aesthetics of Everyday Life* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2012), 261.

Therefore, it can be seen that some modern forms of the sublime do indeed show a tendency to move from the extraordinary to the mundane. Nevertheless, this point refers not only to the phenomena that people encounter in the reality of their everyday lives, but also to their representations in art. Leddy further clarifies that in such cases, art "becomes a medium by which ordinary objects themselves become transformed, becoming experienceable as more than beautiful, as sublime."[168] Thus, while it is agreed that the sublime, in today's perspective, is not only inherent in extraordinary objects, art can also function as a medium that shapes aesthetic experience and allows ordinary objects to be transformed into the sublime. As Peter L. Doebler clarifies,

> [t]he sublime […] has often been associated with exceptional experiences and places that are outside of our daily lives. But what this implies is that our daily lives are in some way inferior, something that must be endured until the rare moment may come again. It assumes the profound experience we think of as 'sublime' only happens with certain kinds of events and ignores the possibility that they may be tokens of a perspective which, if we properly attune our attention, may be encountered at any moment, anywhere.[169]

Hence, it can be agreed that modern forms of the sublime differ from traditional concepts not only in the transformation of the objects and media that convey the experience, but also in the means of when and how the subject can encounter the sublime. It is now recognized that such intense aesthetic experiences can potentially be experienced by anyone at any time, which is also closely related to the shift from elite discourse to a wider public. Gaitanidis and Curk suggest that the contemporary sublime is currently understood "to include ordinary, interpsychic, everyday inclusive, and even mass-media cultural experiences."[170] Therefore, the modern forms of the sublime are now likely to be found in everyday life, also because its nature has shifted from an intellectual discourse to various encounters in mass media, including cinematic material. To put this in the context of the previously analyzed episode of *Black Mirror*, this could mean that the sublime can now also be found in products of mass culture, since this television series is published and, as of 2015, owned by the major streaming platform Netflix. In their study of the everyday sublime, Gaitanidis and Curk draw a parallel between the sublime and products of mass culture, such as cinema, as follows: "Perhaps cinema […] is adept at creating sublime moments that one can reflect on as a spectator from a distance: being in and (safely) out of the experience simultaneously, situated at the border between immersion

[168] Leddy, *The Extraordinary*, 256.
[169] Peter L. Doebler, *Is the Sublime Sustainable? A Comparative Aesthetics Approach to the Sublime* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2023), 93–94.
[170] Gaitanidis and Curk, *The Sublime*, 5.

and distance […]."[171] Thus, modern cinematic material is likely to offer viewers a unique opportunity to encounter intense aesthetic experiences from the safety of their homes, aided by the element of immersion described in more detail in the second chapter. Although the elements of distance and immersion appear to be contradictory, they often work together to create aesthetic experiences. While immersion is a prerequisite that facilitates the emergence of the sublime, psychological distance is what gives the viewer a sense of safety and allows them to transcend the boundaries of fear and danger.

Furthermore, Nathan Carroll observes that academic discussions of cinema and the sublime can encompass "a broad range of filmmakers and techniques" and that it is "just as useful to examine mainstream Hollywood spectacle as it is to frame avant-garde cinema in terms of the sublime. […] Via sublime aesthetics, the study of Michael Bay is potentially every bit as productive as the study of [American experimental filmmaker] Stan Brakhage."[172] Hence, as a result of these scholarly investigations into the aesthetic experience of the sublime as mediated by mass culture products such as Hollywood cinema and, potentially, even television series such as *Black Mirror* released on the streaming platform Netflix, it can be agreed that the category of the sublime is no longer considered an elite intellectual discourse. Instead, it has been identified as present in a whole range of cinematic material across popular genres, allowing the sublime to reach the masses and encounter intense aesthetic experiences possibly more easily thanks to modern media such as cinema or the Internet.

Finally, this shift is also evident in discussions of the so-called *liminal spaces* in Internet aesthetics. Alexander Diel and Michael Lewis observe that "[i]mages typically described as liminal spaces in Internet communities may appear eerie, strange, or uncanny because the depicted places deviate from typical, experience-based expectations of places."[173] Although a proper academic study of this phenomenon is still lacking, there seem to be obvious parallels with the category of the sublime, especially in the ambivalent feelings of eeriness and comfort[174] that liminal spaces may evoke in the viewer. Moreover, the concept of liminal spaces is often associated with modern products of mass culture, such as *The Shining* (1980), *Twin Peaks* (1990), *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), *The Truman Show* (1998), *Vivarium* (2019) or *Severance* (2022).[175] Therefore, it can be agreed that aesthetic experiences of the sublime have

[171] Gaitanidis and Curk, *The Sublime*, 8.
[172] Carroll, *The Cinematic Sublime*, "Introduction," para. 12.
[173] Alexander Diel and Michael Lewis, "Structural Deviations Drive an Uncanny Valley of Physical Places," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 82 (August 2022): 13.
[174] Diel and Lewis, "Structural Deviations," 14.
[175] See for example Jake Pitre, "The Eerie Comfort of Liminal Spaces," The Atlantic, November 1, 2022, https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2022/11/liminal-space-internet-aesthetic/671945/.

their place even in the context of the phenomenon of Internet aesthetics, which further emphasizes their shift from the intellectual and the extraordinary to the mass-cultural and the everyday.

Before moving on to additional examples of the digital or technological sublime, it is important to focus on other modern cinematic material that demonstrates the tendency to move from extraordinary sources to mundane and everyday objects. In David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* (2001) one such potentially sublime event takes place in daylight in a cheap restaurant called Winkie's. The viewer is presented with two men having a discussion about a dream one of them had about the restaurant. The man describes the dream to his friend, explaining that the scene in the dream is an exact replica of the present moment, with the exception of the terror they both feel, and the fact that his friend is standing by the counter. At this point, the atmosphere of the scene changes and suddenly becomes terrifying as ominous music starts playing in the background. The man goes on to describe the main source of terror in his dream, which is a strange person lurking behind the restaurant. His friend suggests that he should go investigate, face the terror of his dream, and see if the stranger is really there. The friend rises to his feet and approaches the counter, and as he turns around and looks at him, the man realizes that this is precisely how his worst nightmare begins; they are both visibly frightened, and his friend is standing at the counter.[176] At this point, the audience may begin to experience the event as sublime. For reasons that may be beyond their comprehension, the reality of the scene turns into the man's worst nightmare. Furthermore, the setting of the scene and other elements that contribute to the feeling of the sublime may be described as mundane rather than extraordinary. As Loew illustrates, "sublime experiences have most commonly been associated with natural phenomena such as mountain ranges, volcanoes, oceans, deserts, earthquakes, cataracts, avalanches, storms, or the starry vault."[177] As mentioned earlier in relation to John Dennis, such sources can be considered extraordinary, and the average person does not encounter them on a daily basis. In comparison, the scene from *Mulholland Drive* conveys the possible aesthetic experience of the sublime in a drastically different way, using objects and events that are completely ordinary. While the source of terror in the scene is based on the reenactment of the man's worst nightmare, the source of pleasure necessary for the experience of the sublime can be found elsewhere and recalls Joseph Addison's writings. As he observes, "the more frightful

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On *Vivarium*, *Twin Peaks*, *Severance*, *Truman Show* and *The Shining*, see Tom Percival, "Severance Was Influenced by This Terrifying Online Urban Legend," The Digital Fix, April 27, 2024, https://www.thedigitalfix.com/severance/urban-legend.

[176] David Lynch, dir., *Mulholland Drive* (Universal Pictures, 2001; Criterion, 2015), Blu-ray, 0:12:15–0:15:35.

[177] Loew, *Special Effects*, 198.

Appearance they [terrifying objects or events] make, the greater is the Pleasure we receive from the Sense of our own Safety."[178] Thus, while watching the scene, the viewer is likely to share the man's feeling of terror and, at the same time, feel a certain amount of pleasure resulting from the psychological distance between the viewer and the event. Therefore, the viewer is presented with a terrifying and at the same time pleasurable event that takes place in broad daylight, during the lunch break of two colleagues in a cheap restaurant full of people, and later also in a dirty alley behind the restaurant. All of these aspects and the setting of the scene can be identified as mundane and everyday rather than extraordinary. Moreover, the main motif of the scene (and perhaps also of the whole *Mulholland Drive* and many other works by David Lynch) is the interweaving of dreams with reality. Once again, dreams can be seen as an involuntary part of each person's everyday life, which further reinforces the mundane basis of the scene. However, the question of the origin and purpose of dreams remains unanswered, and despite their everyday and mundane nature, they often possess a certain incomprehensible power, possibly bordering on the sublime.[179]

Moreover, a similar shift from the extraordinary to the mundane and everyday can be found in Lynch's *Twin Peaks*. In the first season of that series, a recurring scene of a staircase in the Palmer house shows signs of being capable of producing an intense aesthetic experience like the sublime. The first scene capable of doing so takes place after Laura Palmer's body is found wrapped in plastic on the banks of the local river. Her mother, still unaware of what has happened, calls at Laura to wake up: "Laura, sweetheart, I'm not gonna tell you again." Despite her mother's repeated calls, intended to elicit a response from Laura and encourage her to go downstairs and eat breakfast, the girl remains unresponsive. Consequently, the woman places her cigarette on the table and moves toward the staircase. As the camera transitions to a view from below the stairs, unsettling music suddenly begins to play.[180] At this juncture, the staircase becomes an object capable of producing an aesthetic experience of the sublime. Laura's mother ascends the stairs and continues to call at her daughter. The camera remains positioned beneath the stairs, maintaining a static perspective as it does not follow the mother upstairs. The shot is characterized by its low-angle viewpoint, relatively static nature, and abundant lighting. Laura's mother is visible only partially, traversing from room to room in an effort to find her daughter. The only moving element in the scene is a ceiling fan, which is positioned above the staircase

[178] Addison, *The Spectator* 412.
[179] The previous paragraph was drafted in Fousek, "'The Sublime' in David Lynch's Work," 36.
[180] David Lynch and Mark Frost, creators, *Twin Peaks* (CBS Television Distribution, 1990; Criterion, 2015), Blu-ray, S01E01, 0:08:06–0:08:30.

and is spinning.[181] While observing Laura's mother's unsuccessful efforts to locate her deceased daughter, the audience may find themselves fixated on the staircase, which may become their only focus. At this point, their minds can get completely absorbed by it, and its terrifying qualities are likely to exceed their ability to comprehend. Similar shots from below the ominous staircase appear throughout the series, adding to its significance, especially when Laura's mother is questioned by the local sheriff. He asks her when she last saw her daughter, and Mrs. Palmer replies: "It would have been about nine p.m. She came home from Bobby's, and she was going up the stairs." The camera cuts to Mrs. Palmer's terrified face as she looks in the direction of the staircase and continues: "Those stairs right there." At this moment, the camera abruptly transitions to an identical shot of the ominous staircase, accompanied by a sudden, ominous sound.[182] In a sense, this object evokes the previously discussed writings by John Dennis and contradicts his theory that the sublime aesthetic experience may arise only from objects outside of everyday life. The ceiling fan and the staircase are mundane objects, yet Lynch's work utilizes them in an extraordinary manner capable of producing the sublime. Anne Jerslev observes that Lynch's work transports audiences into another world that is "different from our ordinary world, detaches us from our ordinary world and makes the ordinary strange" and that

> [i]n Lynch's work, worlds are *spaces of otherness* into which the viewer can be immersed affectively and go dreaming. […] The unsharp, enigmatic images scattered throughout his work and intertwined everywhere with the ever-present sound and noise create this feeling of blurred boundaries and being surrounded by a different, strange world, one often frightening but also compelling.[183]

Therefore, as Jerslev confirms, Lynch's work allows the audience to immerse themselves in worlds that present the ordinary in an extraordinary way. As a result, objects become strange and unfamiliar (note also the parallel with the phenomenon of the uncanny). Moreover, Jerslev agrees that Lynch's strange worlds can be both terrifying and pleasurable at the same time, a feeling characteristic of the aesthetic experience of the sublime. Therefore, it can be said that David Lynch's work makes use of some of the modern forms of the sublime, which show a tendency to move away from the traditional concept conveyed solely by objects outside of everyday life (as described by Dennis) and towards sublime experiences arising from the mundane and ordinary.[184]

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[181] Lynch and Frost, *Twin Peaks*, S01E01, 0:08:35–0:09:10.
[182] Lynch and Frost, *Twin Peaks*, S01E01, 0:27:30–0:28:48.
[183] Anne Jerslev, *David Lynch: Blurred Boundaries* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 256. Emphasis original.
[184] The previous paragraph was drafted in Fousek, "'The Sublime' in David Lynch's Work," 23.

At this juncture, it is important to focus on how the digital and technological sublime is presented in literary works as opposed to cinematic material. A case in point might be Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), which is set in post-World War II Europe and focuses on the German military's production of V-2 rockets, and can therefore be seen as a work that depicts the terror of technological progress. As noted earlier, although cinema is often seen as the medium best suited to capturing the potential of technological progress, Buchanan asserts that "literature has also, in isolated cases (Pynchon is often singled out), been able to make much of it."[185] It is therefore crucial to consider how aesthetic experiences of the digital and technological sublime are conveyed through literature, and how this differs from the cinematic medium. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, the terrifying features of technology are present from the beginning:

> A screaming comes across the sky. It has happened before, but there is nothing to compare it to now. It is too late. The Evacuation still proceeds, but it's all theatre. There are no lights inside the cars. No light anywhere. Above him lift girders old as an iron queen, and glass somewhere far above that would let the light of day through. But it's night. He's afraid of the way the glass will fall—soon—it will be a spectacle: the fall of a crystal palace. But coming down in total blackout, without one glint of light, only great invisible crashing.[186]

This sequence, after which the reader learns that the sound is produced by a falling V1-rocket in London in December 1944, contains multiple stimuli that are likely to induce the experience of the sublime. In contrast to the *Black Mirror* episode "Nosedive," in which the main object of the sublime was the social media platform, the reader is presented with a product of technology that is potentially much more powerful and terrifying. At the same time, however, there is probably still a certain sense of wonder and astonishment associated with the falling rocket, since it is a human invention and a proof of the immense power of the human intellect. Therefore, it can be said that both "Nosedive" and *Gravity's Rainbow* work with objects that are likely to convey the ambivalent emotions of astonishment and terror. However, while "Nosedive" relied on special effects in its realization, a written medium must find its techniques elsewhere. Marc W. Redfield observes that Pynchon's readers "often find it impossible to distinguish between over-determination and randomness, the patterned and the patternless, [and] the intended and the accidental […]."[187] Thus, in the written medium, the author can rely not only on the terrifying objects depicted, but on other stylistic devices that help the sublime

[185] Buchanan, *Fredric Jameson*: *Live Theory*, 99.
[186] Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 4.
[187] Marc W. Redfield, "Pynchon's Postmodern Sublime," *PMLA* 104, no. 2 (March 1989): 155.

to emerge. Furthermore, Joseph Tabbi clarifies that "Pynchon is the one who has proved capable of releasing the full un-ironical force of the sublime as a stylistic gambit […]."[188] In the aforementioned example from *Gravity's Rainbow*, these stylistic techniques specific to the literary medium can be used to overwhelm the reader's senses, which can also be an element productive of the sublime experience. For example, the scream of the rocket and its immediate danger is gradually transformed into the threat of falling glass through the association between the darkness of the night and the windows that would normally let in daylight. In addition, the reader may be further overwhelmed by the contrasting temporal markers in "It has happened before, but there is nothing to compare it to now," and by the fact that the narrative immediately includes a character referred to with the personal pronoun "he" without any previous introduction or description. As suggested, many of these stylistic devices are specific to the written medium and may not be possible in cinematic material. Moreover, as a result, readers are likely to experience a sensory overload that can lead to incomprehensible and overwhelming feelings that have the potential to initiate the sublime experience. In the next few paragraphs, however, the narrative suddenly changes:

> His name is Capt. Geoffrey ("Pirate") Prentice. He is wrapped in a thick blanket, a tartan of orange, rust, and scarlet. His skull feels made of metal. Just above him, twelve feet overhead, Teddy Bloat is about to fall out of the minstrels' gallery, having chosen to collapse just at the spot where somebody in a grandiose fit, weeks before, had kicked out two of the ebony balusters.[189]

While this strongly suggests that Pirate is the character present in the theater, the reader soon discovers that the gallery in fact refers to the top bunk of a bunk bed, and that the narrative now takes place elsewhere and at a different time. This further emphasizes the stylistic techniques that can be used in literary material to overwhelm the reader. Scott McClintock explains that similar occurrences can be seen as "a kind of mimesis of the montage in film" and that it represents "a flashback or flashforward in time, that is one of the signatures of Pynchon's narrative technique."[190] Hence, while literary material can sometimes employ similar techniques as the cinematic medium, their realization can be much more ambiguous and overwhelming for the reader. Because of these characteristics of the written medium and its ability to overpower the reader, it can again be said that the nature of the medium influences the aesthetic experiences it creates. Lastly, Tabbi points out that "Pynchon's narrative conducts

[188] Joseph Tabbi, *Postmodern Sublime: Technology and American Writing from Mailer to Cyberpunk* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996), 78.
[189] Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*, 5.
[190] Scott McClintock, *Topologies of Fear in Contemporary Fiction: The Anxieties of Post-Nationalism and Counter Terrorism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 111.

the reader along a projectile-like movement of thought, creating the heady illusion that the world is nothing more than a linguistic construct."[191] In this way, *Gravity's Rainbow* has the potential to induce incomprehensible feelings of smallness and insignificance in the reader, as if they were puppets controlled by a master puppeteer. This, in conjunction with the element of immersion discussed earlier, can show how the written medium is capable of initiating the aesthetic experience of the sublime not only through its depiction of powerful objects of technology, but also through its narrative techniques and stylistic devices.[192]

In addition, the discussion of Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* and its technological progress in the form of ballistic missiles evokes the discussions of various sublime experiences arising from apocalyptic motifs. One such form was identified in Frances Ferguson's 1984 article "The Nuclear Sublime," in which she considers "the nuclear as the unthinkable to be the most recent version of the notion of the sublime."[193] Arguably, the notion of the nuclear sublime remains valid to this day, both in reality and in fiction (note, for example, the American television series *Fallout*, released in 2024), and could be a point of further research. Another form that has recently been explored in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic is the concept of the apocalyptic sublime, as discussed by Sam Okoth Opondo and Michael J. Shapiro.[194] As with the environmental sublime mentioned in the second chapter, such observations point to the sublime experience arising from recent global events and may be a subject for future investigation.

In conclusion, this chapter has shown that modern forms of the sublime arising from technology, particularly the digital and technological sublime, can emerge from products of mainstream culture such as the television series *Black Mirror*. This demonstrates the tendency of modern forms of the sublime to move from elite discourse to mass culture. Furthermore, it has been observed that techniques such as special effects and other aspects exclusive to the cinematic medium have the potential to influence the aesthetic experience that emerges from it. The subsequent analysis of written material in the form of selected passages from *Gravity's Rainbow* showed that the literary and cinematic media function differently in creating aesthetic experiences, and that written texts have the ability to overwhelm the reader and initiate the sublime experience through stylistic devices and narrative techniques. Furthermore, based on the analysis of "Nosedive" and selected scenes from *Twin Peaks* and *Mulholland Drive*, the chapter identified a shift from extraordinary objects and events to the mundane and everyday.

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[191] Tabbi, *Postmodern Sublime*, 79.
[192] Note the presence of the ancient Longinian rhetorical sublime even in the context of modern forms.
[193] Frances Ferguson, "The Nuclear Sublime," *Diacritics* 14, no. 2 (Summer 1984): 5.
[194] See Sam Okoth Opondo and Michael J. Shapiro, *Passages: On Geo-Analysis and the Aesthetics of Precarity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2024).

CONCLUSION

The theoretical chapter first established that the aesthetic category of the sublime can be seen as a way of impacting the audience, which was demonstrated by applying reader-response criticism to the category. Furthermore, the chapter delineated various traditional forms of the sublime and showed that the earliest concepts can be traced back to Dionysius Longinus' *On Sublimity*, written in the first century AD. As the chapter noted, the Longinian concept of the rhetorical sublime was primarily concerned with the discipline of oratory practiced on a live audience. After its rediscovery in the late seventeenth century, this concept was redefined and transformed into the natural sublime, meaning that the sublime experience was seen as emerging not only from language but rather from the external world. In connection with this shift, the paper identified the first significant change in the media used to produce the sublime, which shifted from Longinian oral discourse to print culture, allowing the sublime to reach a wider public and reshaping the category and the aesthetic experiences that emerged from it. The chapter then concludes that the early sublime can be considered an elite discourse. Furthermore, through a discussion of the writings of Joseph Dennis and John Addison, it is argued that the experience of the sublime was seen as arising exclusively from objects outside of ordinary life.

The sublime may also be related to the category of the grotesque. The chapter concluded that the grotesque and the sublime can operate with similar aesthetic experiences that are incomprehensible and seem beyond human control. Furthermore, this chapter found that the fascination and astonishment caused by repulsive objects can be related to Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection, meaning that the abject is likely to evoke ambivalent negative pleasures that are typical of the sublime experience. Building on this, the chapter noted that the sublime can now arise from disgust and from objects of technology. The paper also identified another significant shift in the media used to produce the sublime; from the written to the cinematic.

One of the modern forms of the sublime experience can be seen as based on disgust. As noted in the second chapter of the paper, this concept is often called the sublate and is based on various repulsive phenomena such as decay, disgusting odors, or deformed bodies. It was then shown that, with the help of the elements of immersion, distance, and indeterminacy of the text, the disgusting aesthetic experiences arising from it have the potential to be transformed into the sublate experience. This was demonstrated primarily through a close analysis of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*. Using various elements that facilitate the emergence of the sublime as described by Edmund Burke in 1757, such as suddenness, darkness, and obscurity, the novel proved to contain multiple instances capable of triggering the experience of the sublate. Most

of the analyzed passages focused on the disgust caused by dead or deformed bodies, and the vivid descriptions of disgusting smell that can lead the reader to an apprehension. The second example from *The Road* also included other disgust-inducing phenomena, such as human bodies perceived too much as bodies, nudity, and decomposition. This example led to the discussion of disgusting food. Here the paper concludes that intense aesthetic experiences based on disgust, such as the sublate, can be initiated when non-food is described and treated as food, which was further reinforced by the discussion of phenomena related to cannibalism.

In the analysis of disgust in David Cronenberg's *The Fly*, the paper found that the sublate is also closely related to the grotesque. Specifically, the analyzed scenes identified the presence of a grotesque body that can be perceived as both human and non-human. It was concluded that such instances can evoke Kristeva's concept of abjection because the viewer is likely to feel both disgust and fascination when presented with the grotesque body. Furthermore, the analysis of selected scenes from *The Fly* has shown that the medium of film can visually represent disgusting objects and events, which is likely to lead to a more intense aesthetic experience than their description in written text. As the thesis noted, this may be another indication of how the nature of the medium has the ability to influence the aesthetic experiences it conveys.

The analyses of aesthetic experiences of disgust in *The Road* and *The Fly* have indicated that the concept of the sublate, as one of the modern forms of the sublime, is based on disgusting objects that force the subject to contemplate the most general feature of the human being: the body. As suggested, this shift of focus to the human body may be another sign of the transformation from extraordinary objects to the everyday. Furthermore, the thesis identified that in the sublate, disgust may not be experienced as such, but rather as an intense, incomprehensible feeling of insignificance closely related to the fragility of material existence. In addition, the analysis of *The Road* suggested another possible modern form of the sublime related to its post-apocalyptic setting. As the paper suggests, the sublime can now potentially emerge from catastrophic global events such as climate change, which could be a point of further research.

The thesis also identified some other modern forms of the sublime based on objects of technology and the danger of technological progress. By analyzing the episode "Nosedive" of the television series *Black Mirror*, the thesis found that modern forms such as the technological and digital sublime are likely to appear in products of mainstream culture, once again indicating the tendency of some modern forms to move from elite discourse to mass culture. This idea was further emphasized by the discussion of liminal spaces in Internet aesthetics, which are likely to produce similar aesthetic experiences and can reach millions of users every day. Furthermore,

the chapter observed that techniques such as special effects, which are exclusive to the cinematic medium, contribute to the emergence of the sublime and can influence the viewer's aesthetic experience, suggesting that media have the power to shape encounters with the sublime. Moreover, the analysis of "Nosedive" has shown that even the technological and digital sublime can often arise from rather mundane objects and events, such as smartphones and other everyday items. This again highlights the tendency of modern forms of the sublime to use everyday objects and situations, rather than only the extraordinary, as eighteenth-century thinkers believed. This claim was further supported by the analysis of selected scenes from David Lynch's *Twin Peaks* and *Mulholland Drive*, in which the director presents mundane objects in an extraordinary way and uses everyday events, such as a lunch between two friends, to initiate intense aesthetic experiences that are likely to border on the sublime.

The analysis of Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* has shown that the cinematic and written media function differently in creating the sublime experience. While the cinematic medium benefits from its graphic depictions and special effects, the written medium has the unique ability to overwhelm the reader and facilitate the sublime through narrative techniques and stylistic devices, evoking the Longinian rhetorical sublime. Furthermore, the analysis of *Gravity's Rainbow* suggests that some modern forms may currently include the nuclear sublime and the apocalyptic sublime, which could be a focus for further research. Moreover, based on the discussion of the virtual sublime, the paper identified another possible shift toward interactive hypermedia that could also be the subject of future study.

In conclusion, the paper observed that while the analyzed novels and films utilize modern forms of the sublime such as the sublate or the technological and digital sublime, the resulting ambivalent aesthetic experience still remains similar to that described by Burke and others in the eighteenth century. What has changed, however, are the sources of the sublime. First, it was suggested that the sublime experience may now be conveyed not by objects of nature but by objects of technology, and not by terror but by disgust. Second, the paper identified multiple shifts in the media used to produce the sublime, specifically from oral discourse to the written medium and, more recently, to the cinematic medium and hypermedia. As has been shown, media have the power to influence the aesthetic experiences they convey. This is often manifested in the varying intensity of the experience or in the use of different medium-specific techniques that shape the emergence of the aesthetic experience. Finally, the thesis has shown that modern forms of the sublime and their conceptions in popular contemporary art show a tendency to move from elite intellectual discourse to mass culture, and from the extraordinary to the everyday.

RESUMÉ

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá estetickou kategorií vznešena (angl. sublime) a jejími podobami v moderním anglo-americkém románu a filmu. Práce se zaměřuje na celou řadu pojetí této estetické kategorie, počínaje od tradičních koncepcí, jako je vznešeno řečnické a přírodní, až po moderní formy, mezi které patří vznešeno založené na pocitu znechucení, či vznešeno kinematografické, technologické a digitální. Hlavním cílem práce je sledovat vazbu mezi pojetím vznešena, typem média a dobovou estetikou. Práce dále sleduje, jakým způsobem se vznešeno odklání od elitního diskurzu intelektuálů v 18. století směrem k masové kultuře, a analyzuje, k jakému došlo posunu ve smyslu jedinečnosti či všednosti objektů, ze kterých pocit vznešena pramení. Tyto úvahy autor podporuje detailní analýzou vybrané skupiny vizuálního a psaného materiálu. Předmětem analýzy je román *Cesta* (2006) amerického spisovatele Cormaca McCarthyho, film *Moucha* (1986) od kanadského režiséra Davida Cronenberga, román *Duha gravitace* (1973) amerického postmodernisty Thomase Pynchona a vybraná epizoda britského televizního seriálu *Černé zrcadlo* (2011–2025) od Charlieho Brookera. Diplomová práce je rozdělena celkem do tří kapitol, z nichž první obsahuje teoretický rámec a ve zbylých dvou je proveden rozbor vybraných děl.

Estetická kategorie vznešena se vyznačuje svou různorodostí a interdisciplinárním přesahem od filosofie až po literární vědu. Teoretická část práce proto nejprve nastiňuje, že tuto estetickou kategorii lze chápat jako literární či filmový prostředek, pomocí kterého autor ovlivňuje recipienta a vytváří estetické prožitky. Tento předpoklad diplomová práce dokazuje především využitím poznatků z recepční estetiky (angl. reader-response criticism), ve které je recipient považován za hlavního tvůrce významu každého díla. Klíčovou roli zde rovněž zastává subjektivita, jelikož pocit vznešena je založen na vlastní interpretaci každého díla a na estetickém prožitku, který z díla pramení. Teoretická část diplomové práce se následně zabývá historickým vývojem estetické kategorie vznešena. Autorství prvních zmínek o této koncepci totiž bývá přisuzováno antickému filosofu Longinovi a je datováno do prvního století našeho letopočtu. Toto pojetí bývá často označováno za vznešeno řečnické (angl. rhetorical sublime) a jak název napovídá, zaměřovalo se na jazykové kvality řečníků a na jejich projev k živému publiku.

Diplomová práce poté poukazuje na fakt, že ke znovuobjevení této estetické kategorie došlo až ke konci 17. století, a to především ve spojitosti s francouzským překladem Longinova latinského textu. Jak práce dokládá, v tuto dobu prošla kategorie vznešena značnou proměnou. Teoretici jako John Dennis nebo Joseph Addison již totiž nenalézají primární zdroj estetického

prožitku vznešena v jazykových prostředcích, nýbrž ve světě kolem nich, a především v přírodě. V souvislosti s touto přeměnou v přírodní vznešeno (angl. natural sublime) práce také zjišťuje, že došlo k posunu médií používaných k vyvolání pocitu vznešena. Oproti Longinově řečnictví totiž vznešeno začíná pramenit i z psaných zdrojů. Mimoto je v této části práce také stanoven výchozí bod argumentace v podobě vznešena jako elitního diskursu intelektuálů, kteří se vydávali na tzv. grand tours napříč Alpami a během svých cest jako první popsali prožitek přírodního vznešena. Dalším výchozím bodem se zde také stává zjištění, že tito teoretici vnímali vznešeno jako spojené výhradně s extraordinérními objekty zcela mimo běžný život.

Jak práce podotýká, kategorie vznešena může v některých případech také úzce souviset s groteskem. Teoretická kapitola zde nastiňuje, že kategorie groteskna a vznešena mohou být založeny na podobných estetických prožitcích, které se vyznačují svou nezměrnou silou a ambivalencí. Autor práce zde rovněž nalézá paralelu s koncepcí abjekce (angl. abjection) definované Julií Kristevou, která zakládá vztah mezi znechucením a fascinací. Na tomto teoretickém rámci autor představuje moderní koncept vznešena založeného na znechucení (angl. sublate) a rovněž poukazuje na další moderní podoby, jako je technologické a digitální vznešeno (angl. technological and digital sublime).

Druhá kapitola diplomové práce se zabývá analýzou románu *Cesta* a filmu *Moucha* v kontextu prožitku vznešena založeného na znechucení. Kapitola nejprve demonstruje, že pocit znechucení bývá často založen na jevech, jako je rozklad, deformovaná těla nebo zápach. Autor diplomové práce poté představuje prvky imerze, vzdálenosti a neurčitosti textu, které mohou pomoci v přeměně znechucení na prožitek vznešena. Relevanci této moderní podoby vznešena autor poté dokládá především zevrubnou analýzou románu *Cesta* a uvedením do souvislosti s prvky náhlosti, zastření a temnoty popsanými Edmundem Burkem v roce 1757. Ve většině analyzovaných pasáží byl možný pocit znechucení vyvolán mrtvolami či deformovanými těly. V některých případech byl rovněž přítomen detailní popis zápachu, který lze chápat jako určitou předzvěst následně vyobrazeného nechutného objektu. V dalších příkladech z románu *Cesta* autor diplomové práce zjišťuje, že znechucení může také pramenit z nahoty, rozkladu, nechutného jídla či lidského těla, které se vyznačuje přílišnou tělesností. V rozboru filmu *Moucha* poté diplomová práce nalézá spojitost mezi prožitkem vznešena založeným na znechucení a kategorií groteskna. V analyzovaných nechutných scénách, kde se vědec Brundle postupně mění na mouchu, se totiž jeho tělo jeví jako lidské a zároveň nelidské, díky čemuž lze označit za groteskní. Analýza *Mouchy* jakožto filmového média navíc umožnila rozpoznat důležité rozdíly oproti znechucení vyvolaného psaným médiem. Zatímco psaný

materiál spoléhá na popis nechutných objektů a událostí pomocí jazyka, filmový materiál těží ze své vizuální podstaty a může tak vyvolat intenzivnější estetický prožitek. Na základě analýzy těchto dvou děl v kontextu vznešena založeného na znechucení druhá kapitola usuzuje, že znechucení a jeho prožitek nemusí být vždy nechutný, ale může se přeměnit v nepochopitelný pocit bezvýznamnosti a pomíjivosti, který pramení z jádra lidské materiální existence.

Třetí kapitola diplomové práce se zaměřuje na román *Duha gravitace* a televizní seriál *Černé zrcadlo* v souvislosti s potenciálním prožitkem technologického a digitálního vznešena. V první epizodě třetí série s názvem „Pád střemhlav" práce nejprve diskutuje speciální efekty a jiné techniky spjaté s filmovým médiem a poznamenává, že tyto prostředky mohou pomoci vyvolat prožitek vznešena. Autor práce zde navíc navrhuje, že médium má tendenci ovlivňovat estetický prožitek, který z něj pramení. Na základě úvah souvisejících s faktem, že seriál *Černé zrcadlo* je produktem populární kultury, diplomová práce rovněž demonstruje pravděpodobný odklon estetické kategorie vznešena od elitního diskursu k masové kultuře. Analyzované scény z tohoto seriálu také poukazují na posun z objektů nevšedních na objekty každodenní, jako je například telefon či reklamní billboard. Tento posun autor práce rovněž dokládá analýzou vybraných příkladů z díla Davida Lynche, konkrétně ze seriálu *Městečko Twin Peaks* (1990) a filmu *Mulholland Drive* (2001), ve kterých režisér pracuje s každodenními objekty a situacemi, ale vyobrazuje je zcela nevšedními způsoby. Další část třetí kapitoly zaměřená na analýzu vybraných pasáží z románu *Duha gravitace* naznačuje, že psaný materiál vyvolává prožitek vznešena odlišným způsobem než vizuální materiál. Autor diplomové práce zde nastiňuje, že zatímco filmové médium využívá speciální efekty, psaný materiál má jedinečnou schopnost zmocnit se čtenáře pomocí narativních technik a stylistických prostředků, což může pomoci vyvolat prožitek vznešena.

Mezi nejdůležitější závěry, ke kterým autor práce dospěl, patří zejména předpoklad, že moderní podoby vznešena jsou sice založeny na nových a jiných objektech či emocích (např. na znechucení namísto zděšení), ale podstata ambivalentního estetického prožitku popsaného Burkem a dalšími v 18. století zůstává ve velké míře stejná. Dalším závěrem diplomové práce je, že média mají schopnost ovlivňovat estetické prožitky, které z nich pramení, a to včetně kategorie vznešena. Práce dále poukázala na tendenci posunu moderních podob vznešena od elitního diskursu intelektuálů směrem k masové kultuře a na přeměnu z extraordinérních objektů na každodenní.

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Statement:

During the preparation of this thesis, the author used DeepL to enhance the readability and academic style of the text. In certain instances in Chapter 1, the author used QuillBot for paraphrasing. The author also used ChatGPT 4 for brainstorming initial ideas and, in select and carefully revised cases in Chapters 1 and 2, for literature review. No other tools or generative features were used. After using these tools, the author reviewed and edited the content as necessary and takes full responsibility for the content of the paper.